Buddhism Beyond the Monastery

TANTRIC PRACTICES AND THEIR PERFORMERS IN TIBET AND THE HIMALAYAS



EDITED BY

SARAH JACOBY AND ANTONIO TERRONE

BRILL

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VOLUME 10/12

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PIATS 2003: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003.
Managing Editor: Charles Ramble.

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LEIDEN • BOSTON
2009

On the cover: "A noncelibate Tantric yogi (*sngags pa*) with a young pupil at a grocery shop in Gser rta town, Dkar mdzes Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, PRC." July 2007. Photo by Antonio Terrone.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

International Association for Tibetan Studies. Seminar (10th : 2003 : Oxford, England)
Buddhism beyond the monastery : tantric practices and their performers in Tibet and the Himalayas / edited by Sarah Jacoby, Antonio Terrone.
p. cm. — (Brill's Tibetan studies library, ISSN 1568-6183 ; v. 10/12)
"PIATS 2003: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003. Managing Editor: Charles Ramble."
ISBN 978-90-04-17600-3 (hardback : alk. paper)
1. Tantric Buddhism—China—Tibet—Customs and practices. 2. Tantric Buddhism—Himalaya Mountains Region—Customs and practices. I. Jacoby, Sarah. II. Terrone, Antonio. III. Title. IV. Title: PIATS 2003. V. Series.

BQ8912.9.C52T5553 2003
294.3'92309515—dc22

2009025040

ISSN 1568-6183
ISBN 978 90 04 17600 3

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

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INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM BEYOND THE MONASTERY

SARAH JACOBY & ANTONIO TERRONE

Tibetan religions, including Buddhism and Bon, have been profoundly shaped by the institutional influence of monasticism—the congregation of ordained monks and nuns who support a sole religious tradition according to a cenobitic (communal), eremitic (isolated), or peripatetic (itinerant) lifestyle. Although Tibetan tradition claims that monasticism was established in the ninth century with the ordination of the first monastic community at Bsam yas monastery in southern Tibet, the full emergence and development of large-scale monasticism appeared only in the eleventh century with the emergence of the Sa skya school and the foundation of their monastery in Tsang. Buddhist monasticism is widely popular not only in Tibetan society, but also in the culturally akin societies along the Himalayan belt.

Despite its prominent role, monasticism is not the only religious manifestation in Tibetan society. Next to monastic life and activities, a variety of lay or non-celibate movements, communities, traditions, lineages, and religious practices have emerged in Tibet and the Himalayas. While sharing a common lexicon of contemplation and ritual practices with monasticism, non-celibate religious life is predominantly set in the more mundane world of the householder. Tibetan religions, therefore, can be equally characterised by both their monastic and non-monastic manifestations, the latter being popular beliefs, customs, communal gatherings, festivals and ceremonies, and religious rituals typically performed by non-celibate religious professionals.

This volume presents a wide spectrum of studies of the enormous set of cultural practices that constitute the body of Tibetan and Himalayan religion outside of the confines of monastic institutions. The majority of the essays collected in this volume were originally presented as papers at the Tenth Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies in Oxford, England, in September 2003.[1] As these papers focused on rituals, communities, and practices that were largely non-monastic, the organisers clustered the papers

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[1] We would like to thank Dr. Charles Ramble for his extensive efforts organising this meeting and for providing valuable editorial comments on this volume.

into one session appropriately entitled “Buddhism Beyond the Monastery.”[2] In addition to the papers originally presented on this panel, Françoise Pommaret and Sarah Jacoby were invited to contribute their articles, which were originally presented at the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies in Bonn, 2006.

The vantage points from which the essays contained herein view Buddhism beyond the monastery are diverse, including analyses of Tibetan funerary practices, tensions between celibate and non-celibate interpretations of ideal religious conduct, the rise of non-monastic religious institutions such as religious encampments (*sgar*) and mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) in contemporary Tibet led by Treasure revealers (*gter ston*), the overlapping and amorphous borders between Buddhism and Bon as seen through local community rituals in Bhutan and Central Tibet, the significance of spirit mediums (*lha pa*) in Reb gong, A mdo, and the social practices surrounding the recognition of reincarnated lamas (*sprul sku*) in the Tibetan Diaspora. Through these varied studies, readers gain familiarity with a host of religious specialists not necessarily associated with monastic Buddhism including *yogis* and *yoginīs* adept at *gcod* practice, funerary specialists who dispose of bodies in Tibetan sky burials (*ro rgyab pa*), *ḍākinīs* (Tib. *mkha’ ’gro ma*), Treasure revealers (*gter ston*), tantrists (*sngags pa*), *ala* priests, spirit mediums (*lha pa*), and reincarnated lamas (*sprul sku*). A common thread that ties these inquiries together, however, is their methodological approach emphasising ethnographic fieldwork. Though many authors included herein provide close textual analyses, they have also all spent time in the ‘field’ (either Bhutan, Tibet, or the Tibetan Diaspora) gathering information and working with informants to corroborate their findings.

The following essays are organised loosely in chronological and thematic order, beginning with Heather Stoddard’s historical study of the rise of Tibetan sky burial after the fall of the Spu rgyal Empire (7th–9th centuries) and moving quickly to the volume’s focus on the ‘modern’ period of the twentieth-century into contemporary, early twenty-first century Tibet.

Heather Stoddard’s article brings the topic of Buddhism beyond the monastery to a perennial problem in human societies: the disposal of

[2] Ching Hsuan Mei and Damcho Diana Finnegan’s contributions to the Oxford IATS session “Buddhism Beyond the Monastery” unfortunately could not be published here.

the dead. Stoddard explores multiple theories for how and why sky burial replaced earlier burial practices associated with the ancient Spu rgyal Empire between the periods of Fragmentation (846–978) and the Later Diffusion (late 10^{th}–12^{th} centuries). These theories include Zoroastrian influence, climactic changes brought on by a gradual desiccation and altitude increase in Tibet, shifting patterns of belief from pre-Buddhist to Buddhist understandings of the human body, and the influence of *gcod* and *zhi byed* practices in the second half of the 11^{th} century associated with the teachings of Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas and Ma cig lab sgron. Stoddard's subtle analysis questions archaeologists' associations between the spread of *gcod* and *zhi byed* practices from India in the 11^{th} century and the transformation in death rituals from earlier Spu rgyal Empire burial customs to later sky burial practices. Instead, she suggests that Tibetan sky burial is a remnant of the eastward spread of Zoroastrian-influenced Sassanian and Sogdian practices of exposing the dead that entered Tibet from the 8^{th} century onwards. Nevertheless, Stoddard concludes that although sky burial in Tibet came from Zoroastrian Middle Eastern practices, there is a significant conceptual harmony between *gcod* practices involving mentally cutting up the body and offering it as a means to cut ego-clinging and the prevalent Tibetan funerary custom of exposing the dead for vultures to eat in sky burial. This symbiotic relationship between sky burial and *gcod* mutually reinforced both practices under the guise of distinctly Buddhist understanding of the significance of the human body.

Sarah Jacoby's article focuses on the controversial dilemma between celibate and non-celibate interpretations of ideal Tibetan Buddhist conduct. She explores this topic through a study of the biographical and autobiographical writings of Se ra mkha' 'gro (1892–1940), who was both a Treasure revealer (*gter ston*) and a consort. Se ra mkha' 'gro lived outside of the monastery but in another form of religious community called a religious encampment (*chos sgar*), which in early twentieth-century Mgo log was a mobile group of both celibate and non-celibate religious practitioners that often formed around a charismatic Treasure revealer. Jacoby suggests that we can interpret the many dialogues that Se ra mkha' 'gro recounts in her descriptive and prolific auto/biographical writings between herself and divine and human interlocutors as resources not only for a better understanding of the role of women and consorts in Tibetan Buddhism, but also for a social history of the religious

encampments in which she lived and the role of Treasures and their revealers in broader Mgo log nomadic society. Despite both Se ra mkha' 'gro and her teacher and male partner Dri med 'od zer's occasional longings to be celibate monastics, Jacoby argues that the *ḍākinīs*' prophecies so prominent in Se ra mkha' 'gro's writings influenced her to privilege the expedient means of sexuality over the moral superiority of monastic celibacy.

The tensions between monasticism and non-celibacy appear also in the vicissitudes of the Tibetan Treasure tradition in contemporary Tibet according to Antonio Terrone's study. Terrone argues that in today's eastern Tibet, religious encampments (*chos sgar*) and mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) especially associated with the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism have become emblematic of the growing role played by Treasure revealers as educators, innovators, and community leaders in the current revitalisation of Buddhism in Tibet. Whereas monasteries' populations have been limited by restrictive government policies and the traditional religious education they provided has been circumscribed by patriotic re-education campaigns, religious encampments and mountain hermitages have enjoyed a relative freedom of expansion. Not only have they become centres of religious education for monastics as well as non-celibate religious specialists in Eastern Tibet, but they have spurred a resurgence of interest in contemplative practices, especially of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) system, among large groups of Tibetan and even increasingly of Chinese disciples. Central to these non-monastic religious communities' success has been the century-old phenomenon of Treasure revealers' charismatic leadership based on visionary expertise, the evocative energy of miracles, and Treasure excavations that have allowed Tibetans to regain access to forms of religious authority weakened or lost during the long years of religious suppression, ideological control, and mass resettlement in exile.

Although monastics and non-celibate religious professionals differ in terms of training, commitments, and disciplinary codes, the ritual practices engaged in by both categories of religious specialists converge considerably. This is emblematic of the porous boundary not only between monastic and non-monastic communities, but in some cases also between Buddhism and Bon. The soteriological focus of Buddhism has done little to obfuscate the wide spectrum of non-Buddhist or pre-Buddhist beliefs associated with local divine protectors and mountain gods whose ritual propitiation results in mundane, this-world gains relating to community and personal well-

being. Even predominately Buddhist tantrists (*sngags pa*) provide ritual services aimed at mundane benefits as well as spiritual ones such as improving village welfare, personal health, crops, weather, and fertility. Religious festivals and local community rituals are often thus neither distinctly Buddhist nor Bon and continue to be important in many Tibetan and Himalayan cultural areas, providing a cohesive sense of local identity in the face of rapid modernisation and change.

Françoise Pommaret's article examines this porous boundary between Buddhism and Bon with a comprehensive study of a group of rituals she terms 'local community rituals' in Bhutan. These are annual multi-day rituals conducted by village communities meant to ward off evil influences and bring prosperity to villagers by pleasing local gods. Though the Bhutanese define these rituals as Bon, Pommaret points out that their participants are usually devout Buddhists, thus demonstrating another way in which Bon/Buddhist distinctions are context-dependent and flexible. Pommaret's comprehensive data stem from a larger project in which she has participated since 2001 under the auspices of the Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS), one of the colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan, with funding from UNESCO for the documentation of intangible cultural heritage (see the annex to Pommaret's article for a short description of all the rituals documented by this project in 2003–2004). Pommaret concludes that these local community rituals represent the flexibility of Buddhism as it spread into the region of Bhutan, integrating the Buddhist focus on betterment for the next life with the local deity cults whose focus was the potentially antagonistic goal of seeking happiness in this life. But Pommaret argues that more than being a way to secure temporal happiness, local community rituals reflect local identity and continue to be important territory markers for Bhutan's ongoing nation building and administrative reorganisation.

Nicolas Sihlé continues this focus on Buddhist/Bon overlap by exploring a particular class of ritual specialist called the *ala*, or *lha bon*, in the southern agricultural part of Snye mo, a small rural area in Central Tibet. Suggesting that *ala* are neither Buddhist nor Bon clergy proper, Sihlé attempts to move away from overly simplified distinctions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions and instead to speak of a religious spectrum ranging from hegemonic Buddhism on one side and only partially Buddhicised traditions on the other. Sihlé finds hybridity in his case study of the relations between the *ala*

priestly class and *sngags pa*, or ‘tantrists’, who are either non-celibate Buddhists or Bon po religious specialists with hereditary lineage succession, instead of strict dichotomies between the two overlapping groups. Through examining a local collective ritual called the Chos skor involving the circumambulation of religious texts around the cultivated land of a village in order to benefit the crops, Sihlé demonstrates that despite the overlapping roles of *ala* and *sngags pa* in the ritual, distinctions in their religious specialisation and attributes can be found. Whereas the *ala* are always Bon and are associated with purification and fertility rituals as well as local place gods, the *sngags pa* can be either Buddhist or Bon and are particularly associated with exorcistic and other violent ritual activities such as warding off hail. Sihlé’s case study thus emphasises the hybridity and multiplicity of priestly categories that can be found in specific Buddhist localities, reminding the scholar of Tibetan religious studies that monastic Buddhism is only one facet of the varied and rich Tibetan religious field.

A form of social and religious authority particularly important outside of Buddhist monasticism within Tibetan lay communities is that of ‘spirit mediums’, or *lha pa*. Considered the mouthpiece of the gods, spirit mediums along with other religious professionals in contact with the dharma protectors (*chos skyong*) such as oracles (*sku rten*) are essential elements of both Tibetan Buddhism and Bon. In pre-1959 Tibet, they occupied a respected role in the social and religious life of many communities. Danzang Cairang’s essay illustrates the history and the functions of *lha pa* in Reb gong, A mdo. He suggests that *lha pa* had an influential role in decision-making within their communities regarding issues ranging from social welfare to military affairs. Just like many other religious manifestations, the tradition of the *lha pa* suffered many hardships during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution, but has since been reinvigorated by the PRC’s more relaxed policies on religious practice and by renewed popular interest. Covering various aspects of the spirit-mediumship practised in the Reb gong community, Danzang Cairang discusses the recruitment of *lha pa*, the practices and performances associated with them, and the role they played both historically and today in the social and religious life of Reb gong.

The final topic addressed in this volume relates to the selection process of children recognised as reincarnated lamas (*sprul sku*). Marcia Calkowski’s article analyses the ways in which reincarnated lamas (*sprul sku*) are recognised from the perspective of the signs and

portents their families and local communities experience that often serve to validate the children's eventual official recognition. Focusing not on the official monastic recognition process but rather the popular one, Calkowski outlines several different social practices that can serve as signs of legitimation that a given child is a *sprul sku* including environmental or atmospheric phenomena such as rainbows, unusual thunderstorms, unusual or abundant crop growth, and significant dreams or visions experienced by those living in close proximity to the *sprul sku*. Additionally, Calkowski argues that secrecy, or the sudden reticence to talk about extraordinary signs, as well as attempts to keep a child especially 'clean' also serve as strong indicators that a child is extraordinary and will soon be officially recognised as a *sprul sku*. Calkowski thus demonstrates that the process of monastic succession via reincarnation entails far more than deliberations within the monastery but also is embedded in a wider system of social practices in which the laity surrounding the potential *sprul sku* plays a significant role.

EAT IT UP OR THROW IT TO THE DOGS? DGE ’DUN CHOS ’PHEL (1903–1951), MA CIG LAB SGRON (1055–1153) AND PHA DAM PA SANGS RGYAS (D. 1117): A RAMBLE THROUGH THE BURIAL GROUNDS OF ORDINARY AND ‘HOLY’ BEINGS IN TIBET

HEATHER STODDARD

The title of this paper is lengthy and facetious but is in fact based upon a real questioning on the part of the author concerning the various options available in Tibetan society for disposing of the dead. Resonances between several strands of research carried out over the last decade have brought up more questions than answers, and include explorations into multi-culturality under the Tibetan empire of Spu rgyal; social and religious change in the early ‘Latter Diffusion’ (*phyi dar*); on site work in Gra thang monastery between 1994 and 2000; readings in the life stories of Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas and Ma cig lab sgron; some oral testimony on mummies during the Cultural Revolution from the late Prof. Dung dkar Blo bzang phyin las; and finally, the recent rewriting of the life story of A mdo Dge ’dun chos ’phel.[1]

The year 2003 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of A mdo Dge ’dun chos ’phel (Dge chos) and it is fitting to mention him as a contemporary hero, even if to invoke his death rather than his birth. In 1951, when Dge chos realised that he was on the point of dying, he said to one of his friends: “Throw my body away, like a beggar, to the dogs”. I have often thought about this statement. What does it represent? The utterings of a mad saint? A Buddhist cliché? A Buddhist's kind thought for dogs? Tibetan ironic self-depreciation (throw my body to the dogs, instead of to the more noble birds)?[2] Or is

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[1] This is a third version developed from 1) the original paper presented in Paris, Colloque France-Norvège, EHESS Spring 17.6.02, “The Funeral Rituals of Pha Dam pa Sangs.rgyas and Ma gcig Lab sgron. Shall we cut them up?” 2) The Columbia University Seminar on Buddhist Studies: Spring 2003 Seminar Series 17.04.03, “Gra thang, Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas, Ma gcig & gCod”. It was in Gra thang, at the residence of Gter ston Gra pa mngon shes (1012–1091), or at his temple, that Ma gcig and Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas first met in the second half of the 11th century.

[2] According to Chenaktsang Dorje Tsering (alias Jangbu) this is a common self-depreciatory remark.

it a reference to the reality of many sky burials in Tibet, where dogs and/or jackals also took part in the feast? Is it perhaps a more theoretical reference to the *Rdzogs pa chen po klong chen snying thig gi sngon 'gro* text of 'Jigs med gling pa, in section one, where during the evocation of one's own death one recites: *mal gyi nang nas sa phyogs stong par bskyal/ wa dang bya rgod khyi yis 'drad pa'i dus*/…, "When being carried off from one's bed to an empty place, and being torn apart by foxes, vultures and dogs...".[3]

Whatever Dge chos meant with regard to his own life and body in the mid-20th century, and whether we take it as the remark of a drunken yogi contemplating the evanescent beauty of a flower, this statement reflects a very different kind of value and/or rhetoric in relation to the human body, as compared to other world religions or systems of thought, be they Judaeo-Christian, Islamic, Hindu or Confucian. It also marks a distinctly alternative view when compared with what we know of death rites on the Tibetan plateau from Neolithic times onwards, and notably the complex last rites reserved for the elite of the Spu rgyal empire (early 7th-mid 9th century).[4]

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[3] See *Thang stong rgyal po'i rnam thar* (Bde chen 'gyur med 1982: 91) in which there is a charming scene of Thang stong rgyal po going to the cemetery of Ra ma do le, where he is greeted not only by the *dpa' bo* and *mkha' 'gro* of the place who offer him a *ganacakra*, but by "jackals who at first gathered round like wolves and beggars, thinking only of food, but then subdued by his great compassion, became like dogs greeting their master, smelling the delicious smell of his body (noted elsewhere in his *rnam thar*), showing their delight but not being able to speak, and since they love meat and blood, only giving the impression that they wanted to kill him and eat him. So he thought of them with compassion, of their wandering from hell realm to hell realm. The hairs on his body quivered and his tears fell and he prayed with joined palms to the Noble (Avalokiteśvara)…".

[4] The death rituals of the ruling dynasty of Spu rygal are described in some detail in contemporary sources, the Dunhuang manuscripts, and in later *gter ma* literature. These have been analysed and discussed in research carried out by Lalou 1952, Tucci 1950, Haarh 1969, for example. They involved complex and long-drawn out burial procedures with officiating priests, the deposing of the mummified remains of the emperor, his life size portrait, and his personal treasure in three different tombs. The main tombs were large structures that can be seen today in two important sites in the TAR, in 'Phyong rgyas and Snang rdzong. See Panglung 1988 for an excellent study of the two sites mentioned above (in German), and Chayet 1994 for an overview of Chinese publications on tomb sites. Numerous other necropoli can be seen in other parts of Central Tibet, while small individual or collective tombs for ordinary people are to be found near villages all over the Tibetan plateau. Archaeological digs carried out by researchers from Tsethang are beginning to come up with some new and important finds, and from the available evidence, people from all levels of society were buried in tombs, from Neolithic times right through to the end of the military empire of Spu rgyal. See also Xu Xingguo 2006 on the great necropolis of Dulam in A mdo (Chin. Qinghai, Dulan).

According to available archaeological evidence, the most widespread means of disposing of the dead in Tibet from earliest times right through to the end of the empire was through burial.

Furthermore, in the context of this brief study, we may note the contrast between Dge chos's flippant remarks about A mdo beggars and the actual way his friends and disciples looked upon him in life and during the process of death. He was highly respected as a 'mad saint', but above all as a 'lama-scholar', a *mkhas grub* in the traditional sense, i.e., as an outstanding member of the great Vajrayana tradition of the Indo-Tibetan world.

Although—perhaps due to the lack of funds—his body was not cremated as would normally be the case with spiritual masters, neither was it offered to the dogs and jackals. Instead it was disposed of in the way that is still normal for many Lhasa people, that is by cutting up and offering to the vultures of Pha bong ka cemetery behind Se ra. At the same time, to mark his special religious status, the *ro rgyab pa* body cutters removed his skull, while a *sku gdung* reliquary stupa was made and placed in the courtyard of his friend and benefactor Hor khang Bsod nams dpal 'bar.

This sheds light on another dual representation of the human body in Buddhism. Firstly, the ordinary human body as an object of analysis and contemplation, an example of the impermanence of all phenomena. The body after death came to be considered as an empty carcass—an expendable comestible item useful for feeding other hungry living beings. Secondly, the precious human body as a unique vehicle for attaining the bliss of *nirvāṇa*, for 'going beyond the suffering' of *saṃsāra*. In the Vajrayana tradition, they went one step further by claiming that the human body is a unique vessel for attaining Enlightenment in one single lifetime. By extension—indeed this is so since the time of Lord Sakyamuni—the bodies, or parts of bodies of 'realised beings' *grub pa thob pa*, were and still are considered to be treasured relics. Buddhists consider that advanced practice allows for a transmutation of base physical matter into a pure and powerfully magical substance.[5]

As we shall see below, Dge chos's statement integrates not only the Buddhist point of view and the Tibetan social stance of humility, but appears also to reflect the less well documented Zoroastrian or Persian tradition that influenced Tibet from early times, and about which Dge chos himself wrote in *The Plain of Gold (Gser gyi thang ma*) with

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[5] Guidoni 2006.

regard to the costumes of the emperors and nobles of Spu rygal.[6] In the present context, it seems that Dge chos's remark about throwing his body to the dogs could echo the ancient Zoroastrian custom of offering the flesh of the dead human body to dogs as well as to birds, and the probable spread of this practice to Tibet around the turn of the second millennium CE, if not before.

EARLY *PHYI DAR*, HISTORICAL SOURCES: RUPTURE OR CONTINUITY?

The origin and historical introduction of the practice of sky burial into Tibet is the main point of enquiry here. The link with Zoroastrian funerary customs has of course been thought of by Tibetologist colleagues. Yet I do not know of any research paper that has attempted to deal with the question of its introduction into Tibet. The problem is one of *apparent* rupture, of a fundamental transformation concerning the last rites of human beings. This suggests important changes in the social, economic, cultural and religious spheres.

The question of death in itself, and of what to do with the dead human body is of course essential to human society from earliest times and is no doubt one of the causes of religious sentiment, philosophic thought and the creation of ritual. Thus when a society changes its funeral practices there must be strong reasons, which may also be connected with the geographic location of human settlements, climatic changes and shifting patterns of belief.

But how and why did such a radical transformation take place in Tibet—especially in the context of the assimilation of Buddhism at all levels of society during of the period in question? No other Buddhist nation adopted this practice, and from any point of view, the shift from burial in tombs to cutting up the human body and offering it to vultures is by no means an easy one. And yet, it appears, from all available sources—textual and archaeological—that the rupture took place around one thousand years ago, i.e., some time between the 'Fragmentation of Tibet' (*Bod sil bu'i dus skabs*, ca. 846–978) following the collapse of the empire and the early period of the *phyi dar* (late 10th-early 12th centuries).[7] We know little about what

[6] Dge 'dun chos 'phel 1990: ch.15, 82–83.

[7] This must have been a gradual procedure, during which certain traditional practices would have been maintained in parallel to the new Buddhist practices that were gradually being integrated—first in the court and among the educated elite, before permeating down to lower levels of society.

happened during the period of 'Fragmentation', but the first two centuries of the *phyi dar* certainly had a profound effect on the evolution of Tibetan society over the next millennium.

With regard to this question there is a sort of consensus inside Tibet today, amongst archaeologists working *in situ*.[8] I have gleaned this information from numerous conversations on journeys in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), especially when passing by the tomb sites that are scattered around the valleys in the lie of the mountainsides. It is thought that the abandoning of tombs was due essentially to a change in the belief system, when Buddhist concepts overtook those of pre-Buddhist Tibet. It is further suggested that the transformation coincided with, or was strongly influenced by, the introduction and rapid spread of *gcod* and *zhi byed* practices in the second half of the 11th century, by Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas (d. 1117 in Ding ri) and his disciples, notably Ma cig lab sgron (1055–1153).[9] With regard to this hypothesis, one question comes to the fore. If this is indeed the case, then surely this profound transformation would be reflected in the last rites offered to both these religious masters. But before going on to examine the textual evidence in their *rnam thar* let us look at three distinct factors that are likely to have contributed to the transformation in Tibetan death rites. The first is connected with the natural environment and the two others with cultural influences:

1) Climatic change on the Tibetan plateau over the last millennium (and much more) due to the rise in altitude of the Himalayan ranges. The consequence of this extremely slow process is the drying up of the land, the disappearance of forests and lakes. Though this long term external geo-climatic factor cannot be ignored, it is not easy to apply it to a specific time period or territory.

2) The full assimilation of Indian Buddhism, from the 7th century onwards, but especially from the beginning of the *phyi dar* (10th–11th centuries). This brought in fundamental new concepts:

[8] As far as the author knows this general 'opinion' is unpublished.

[9] The author visited Gra thang monastery almost every year between 1994 and 2002, in the context of the Shalu Association project for the protection and conservation of the 11th-century temple, founded by Pha Dam pa's disciple, and Ma gcig's lama, Gter ston Gra pa mngon shes (1012–1081). Pha Dam pa came to meet both Gra pa and Ma gcig at Gra thang.

a. The Buddhist vision of the human body, in opposing terms:

i. As the ‘precious human body’, the vehicle of Enlightenment

ii. As a composite, impermanent entity (i.e., the nature of all phenomena), a sack of impurities, excreta, blood, pus etc.

iii. The practice of the six *pāramitā*, especially that of generosity, and the related practices of *gcod* and *zhi byed*

3) The eastward spread of the Zoroastrian practice of exposing the dead, especially through Sogdian culture ca. 8th century onwards, suggesting not only an eventual connection with Bon, but also considerable exchange between the Iranian world and Tibet.

The third factor can be understood within the multi-cultural ethos of the Tibetan empire of Spu rgyal and its rich legacy. Like the marriage system in Tibet over the last millennium, death rituals appear to include all possible variations. At present, these are divided conceptually and practically into four categories according to the elements: earth, fire, water and air. Thus burial in the EARTH belongs essentially to the pre-historic and imperial periods. It is later condemned in popular discourse as a possible source for the much feared *ro rlangs*, or zombies. FIRE is reserved essentially for lamas (due no doubt to the shortage of wood and other combustibles on the high plateau). WATER disposal in rivers is still used for those who die tragically or of sickness.[10] SKY burial, the cutting up of the body and the offering of it to vultures and to dog-like jackals, is the preferred mode of disposal of the mortal remains of every Tibetan right to the present day. In addition to these, the other main technique is that of mummification. This is known to have been used for at least

[10] In 2002, while on a visit to Bsam yas, our driver stayed the night on the south side of the Gtsang po river. The next day he told us how a young man who had the reputation of being a terrible drunkard in that area had died after a drinking bout in front of them in the inn. Since he had no known relatives the men of the place immediately set about cutting his body up into quarters and then smaller pieces, before throwing the whole lot into the river. The author also saw a human head resting on the sand on the Bsam yas side several years earlier, during another trip to the monastery.

the last five hundred years,[11] again especially for lamas. We shall come back to this sophisticated technique with a surprising contemporary story at the end.

THE ZOROASTRIAN-'BON' CONNECTION

As already mentioned, the most likely link in the case of sky burial has already been thought of by many colleagues. The neighbouring Zoroastrians of Persia and later their surviving descendants, the Parsees of Mumbai, practised a form of 'sky burial'. Even today, the Parsees expose their dead to vultures in the 'Towers of Silence' on the top of a high hill near Mumbai, surrounded by impenetrable walls.

The general feeling is that this practice would have come to Tibet through the Bon tradition and its connections with the Iranian world of 'Ol mo lung ring and/or Tag zig. However if this were the case then one would expect this practice to be attested to in Bon sources. One would also expect some mention of it during the empire of Spu rgyal. Yet, such connections remain to be established. I have not yet been able to explore the large body of potential Bonpo source materials, such as the Dur Bon rituals, and the large number of volumes—at least 20—of Bon po *gcod* practice.[12] Moreover, in spite of what would seem to be a logical connection, present day Bon po scholars, notably Slob dpon Rnam dag and Samten Karmay, do not recall any specific references to the practice of sky burial in their literature.

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[11] Perhaps the earliest attested example of a mummified body known to the author is that of Sman bla don grub (15th century), founder of the Sman bris school of painting. His body was retrieved from a smashed stupa in 1966, in the night, during the Cultural Revolution, and hidden away for around 35 years, before being re-enshrined in a newly built temple in his birth place at Sman thang, in ca. 1998. The author visited the valley in 1999. He would have died after Tsong kha pa who was also reputedly mummified. A recent documentary film showing an example of self-mummification, says that the mummy found in Tapo, Spiti, dates back according to Carbon 14 testing to the 15th century. Furthermore, there have been reports in the Chinese press of the recent discovery of Rin chen bzang po (958–1055) in a wooden box swathed in sumptuous robes as a monk. However, according to several of his *rnam thar* he was cremated (*gdung sbyang*) and little in the way of bones or *śarīra* remained. See the *Collected Biographical Material about Lo-chen Rin-chen bzang-po* (Rin chen bzang po 1977). The custom goes back at least to the Spu rgyal empire.

[12] According to Slob dpon Rnam bdag, whom the author visited in his monastery in the Kathmandu Valley in 2000.

THE SASSANIAN & SOGDIAN CUSTOM OF ‘DÉCHARNEMENT’, STRIPPING THE FLESH FROM THE BONES

On the other hand, the doctoral thesis of the French Sogdian specialist and linguist, Franz Grenet (which seems to have gone un-noticed in Tibetological circles) reveals striking links between Zoroastrian death rituals, especially among the Sassanids and Sogdians, and Tibetan sky burial practice.[13] Quoting the *Avesta* and the *Vendidād* (basic texts of the adorers of Ahura Mazda) and using archaeological evidence from a large number of sites scattered over a vast area and over one millennium, Grenet describes the practice of ‘décharnement’, i.e., the initial step in dealing with the dead body according to Zoroastrian practice, which is the removal of the flesh from the bones either by exposing the body to wild animals or by stripping the flesh from the bones carried out by human intervention.[14]

Grenet’s book is full of references that resonate with Tibetan sky burial. At the same time other aspects are quite distinct. One major difference from Tibet is the collecting of bones after the stripping of the flesh and their conservation in ‘*osotheks*’—specially made receptacles decorated with various designs and inscriptions—or in *naus* chambers built for the purpose. There are also the food offerings made by Sogdians, and other peoples to their dead, who place them near the *osotheks* during the last month of each year. This is in conformity with Zoroastrian rites.[15]

Grenet confirms other practices related to Zoroastrianism from archaeological and textual evidence.[16] Furthermore, he shows the gradual spread eastwards of the phenomenon of ‘stripping of flesh from the bones’, via sedentary civilisations during the first millennium of the Common Era, from around the beginning of the 1st century CE through the 10th or 11th centuries.[17] This occurred first of all in Parthia-Margiane, where cremation was eliminated and replaced by this new custom. It seems that initially there was a broad diversity within the

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[13] Grenet 1984: ch 9, 225 ff. An important section of his work which he calls “sepulture à décharnement”, i.e., funeral rites that consist in exposing or treating the body, so as to get rid of the flesh.

[14] Grenet 1984: 23, 32.

[15] Grenet 1984: 249.

[16] Grenet 1984: 251–52, where he presents an *osothek* bearing an inscription dated ca. 650–750 according to the Zoroastrian calendar.

[17] See maps 2–5 in Grenet 1984.

practice, but little by little a certain uniformity came to be observed. By the 3rd–4th centuries the custom had spread to Khorezm before expanding in an important way amongst the Sassanians and a little later on the Sogdians. Funerary rites among the latter changed from the earlier burial in nomadic necropoli to the 'stripping of flesh from the bones' during the 5th–6th centuries. Although this shows that they had adopted Zoroastrian funeral rites, it seems that they did not embrace the religion of Ahura Mazda in its totality. Thus in different forms and modes this practice spread southwards and eastwards, carried no doubt in the last instance by Sogdian emigrants, and/or by newly sedentarised nomads.

A significant detail from Sogdiana—whose language and writing were maintained right through to the 11th century—recalls the well attested Tibetan *ro rgyab pa* community, who lived in special quarters on the edge of the city of Lhasa right through to the middle of the 20th century. Wei Tsie (Jie?), Chinese ambassador to Sogdiana in the early 7th century, described a community of 200 families who lived in separate quarters outside the capital city of Pendzikent. They were funeral specialists and breeders of dogs, considered to be the most sacred animal by the Zoroastrians. When someone died, it was their job to take the body away. The flesh was devoured by the dogs (after 'décharnement'?) and the bones were gathered 'to be buried' (or placed in an *osothek*?).

POLLUTION AND THE DISPOSAL OF THE BODY

The main reason given for this practice in the *Vendidād* was the fear of dead matter. It was necessary to transport the body to the place of 'décharnement' to be exposed to carnivorous animals, so as to get rid of the flesh as soon as possible, reducing it to inoffensive bones. This place would be the highest available spot and dogs and birds would be present.[18] The body was attached by the hair or the feet[19] and once the bones were dry they would either be left in the sun (out of reach?), or else put away so that dogs, jackals, foxes, wolves and rain could no

[18] For Grenet 1984 on the 'towers of silence', see 85–86, 227, 230–31, 229, 238, 316.

[19] As in some cemeteries in Tibet to the present day, for example the one behind 'Bri gung mthil, just above Mkha' 'gro tshogs chen skyi ri yongs rdzong, where jackals came to consume the bodies of the yogis of 'Bri gung. See Dowman 1988: 118–19.

longer get at them. The receptacle, as already mentioned, was made of dried or baked earth, plaster or stone, and called a *naus*, or an *osothek*. In this region in much earlier times, in the 4th–3rd century BCE, the ashes of cremated persons would be placed in vases with skinned sheep's heads.[20] The *osothek*, which may perhaps be a later form of those vases, were smallish, like the present day containers for the ashes of the cremated dead in Europe. They were made in different styles, for example in the shape of a yurt, a casket, or a horse's head. They were sometimes decorated with a red substance.[21] In the 7th–8th centuries in Sogdiana, the *naus* were larger constructions with one chamber or a vault, made of dry unfired bricks and covered over.[22] We shall come back to these later on.

A series of prohibitions accompanied the treatment of the cadaver. Anthropophagy was punishable by immediate death. Cremation or the placing of a body in water was punished and burial was strictly forbidden, though worthy only of light punishment—except if the body was not exhumed within two years(?).[23] If burial did take place the earth itself only became pure again after fifty years. An inexpiable crime was to 'throw the body on the ground', without any precaution.[24] No offerings were to be placed with the body at time of the funeral and it had to be naked. Tears and lamentation were also strictly forbidden, although this rule does not seem to have been respected among the Sogdians and there appears to be some controversy among specialists concerning this question.[25] It was

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[20] Grenet 1984: 65. This may recall the skinned sheep's heads used in various Tibetan rituals.

[21] Grenet 1984: 123, 157.

[22] Grenet 1984: 161–62, 165, in Pendzikent. Mention is made of *pakhsa* blocks used in the construction of the *naus*. This may or may not recall the Tibetan *sa spag*, sun-dried earth bricks.

[23] Cf. the inhumation-exhumation practices in Tibet during the Spu rgyal Empire. Three years is mentioned before exhumation, see Lalou 1952.

[24] In certain regions in Tibet, for example in Mgo log, A mdo, the cadaver should not touch the earth, only stone in the case of sky burial, or wood in the case of cremation. Thanks to Kathok Rigdzin Pema Wangchen for this oral information.

[25] Tibetans generally do not lament or wail during the cutting up and disposal of the body, although it is often the case that close family members are present. For it is said that the sound and the sensation that comes from the crying is hugely multiplied, resounding like a great thunderstorm for the dead person. Relatives may stand at a certain distance around the periphery of the site and turn their backs. See Grenet 1984: 266 on the ritual of lamentation and the wall painting in the Maya cave, Qyzyl (Kutcha), showing Buddha's funeral (I-Grunwedel 1912: 179, pl. XLVIII b) as well as the violent lamentation and bloody ceremonial seen in local rites in Chorasmie and Sogdiana. The artist shows them with traits and costumes of several peoples of the region in the 7th–8th centuries. See Grenet 1984 n. 67: "those in caftans with plain lining are said to be Kutcheans, the two men on the top row with braids are said to be

further believed that the soul would stay near the head for three days, and that one year was needed to dissipate the impurity created by the death.[26]

VARIANT PRACTICES

Variant practices are mentioned by Grenet. These range from the body being left to decompose, to the more normative feeding of it to animals and birds, and/or to direct human intervention. In India, for example, the legislator al-Biruni from Khorezm[27] ordered the people to "expose their dead to the wind". So they built walled constructions with openings for the wind, as in the Zoroastrian towers of silence, presumably out of the way of wild creatures.[28] Another story tells of the stripping of flesh from the bones by human companions of the dead person, as in Tibet. It was in 739 when the king of Bukhara, an ally of the Arabs, was assassinated in Samarkand. His servants removed the flesh from his bones before carrying them back to his kingdom.

The eastward spread of the new religion of Islam towards the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 8th centuries led, however, to a gradual abandoning of this practice of 'stripping the flesh'. Specific ethnic communities, such as the Tokkala[29] in the mid 8th century and the Sogdians at the time of the founding of the Abbassid Caliphate of Baghdad are mentioned by Grenet, although he affirms that the *osotheks* in which the bones were stored continued to be made right through to the 11th century and more modest forms of the stripping of flesh continued through the 9th century and even right up to the end of

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W. Turcs", (see the wall painting of Afrasiab, with the "entourage of the King of Samarkand" (I-Al'baum 1975, figs. 4–7 & pl.VII-XI, XXXII), and Grenet n. 68: "Jettmar compares Qyzyl with a scene at Pendzikent, supposing that the Sogdian artist adapted a model coming from the East"). However, Grenet does not agree with Jetmar's conclusions.

[26] As in Tibet today, the official time of mourning is one year.

[27] Khorezm, an ancient and medieval state in Central Asia, is situated in and around the basin of the lower Amu Darya River; now the region of NW Uzbekistan. Khwarazm is one of the oldest centres of civilisation in Central Asia. It was a part of the Achaemenid empire of Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BCE and became independent in the 4th century BCE. It was later inhabited by Indians who adhered to Zoroastrianism and used the Aramaic script. Khwarazm was conquered by the Arabs in the 7th century and converted to Islam. Notes taken from www.encyclopedia.com.

[28] Grenet 1984: 167. See also 227, 229, 240.

[29] Part of Khorezm, south of Lake Aral.

10th.[30] The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang (602–664) attested in his *Journey to the West* that the Sogdians were Zoroastrian fire-worshippers. He described them as being in opposition to the inhabitants of Buddhist lands with their highly eclectic religion[31] and its supreme goddess, Nana, who rides a lion and rules over wild beasts. Lastly, according to Grenet, as already mentioned, the most sacred animal of the Zoroastrians is the dog, who received almost the same treatment as that given to human beings.[32]

THE INTRODUCTON AND ASSIMILATION OF BUDDHISM IN TIBET

The introduction of Buddhism into Tibet in the 7th century led to a radically different vision of the human body as compared to what we know of funerary customs in Tibet in prehistoric times and during the empire of Spu rgyal. As mentioned above, two aspects to the new conceptual world view are useful to note here:

1) the human body is taken to be an object of analytic contemplation, leading to disgust, since it reveals the impermanence of all phenomena.

2) the human body is apprehended as *the* vehicle of Enlightenment, *the* means to experience the bliss of Buddhahood.

A recent French translation of a classic Buddhist treatise, the *Visuddhimagga* by Buddhaghosa[33] dated ca. 430 CE describes in full analytic detail the meditation practices that a monk undertakes on the 'path of purity'. Although this is a Theravadin text, the whole discourse resonates with references and practices that are still to be found today in the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition. For example, the corpus is divided into three stages: *śīla*, *samādhi* and *praññā/prajñā,* i.e., 'discipline', 'meditative absorption' and 'wisdom', as in the 'three trainings' (*bslab pa gsum*) found in Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhaghosa presents in extreme 'scientific' detail the

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[30] Grenet 1984: 226.

[31] Grenet 1984: 23 speaks of the "large capacity of absorbing the foreign cults of Śiva, Durga, and influences from the Jews and Manicheans."

[32] Grenet 1984: 37.

[33] In the series *Trésors du bouddhisme*, ed. P. Carré, Fayard (in bibliography as Buddhaghosa 2002).

important aspects of a monk's training, dealing especially with the observation of the human body as a basis for understanding *saṃsāra* and for gaining enlightenment. The main relevant points for this present study are mentioned briefly below:

> In chapter six the monk practitioner is encouraged to frequent cemeteries and observe in minute detail the decomposition of the body, in order to develop an understanding of impermanence, a disgust for the material world of *saṃsāra*, and to chase away fear.
>
> In chapter eight he is given instructions on how to observe the functions of the body, its breathing and so on, and to think of it as being made up of distinct parts, like "a cow being cut up into pieces by a butcher", and to observe his own perception of the pieces of meat.
>
> Then in chapter fourteen he is encouraged to practice detailed and intense concentration on all parts of the body, on its physical aspects, the organs of the senses, the states of consciousness and so on. Following this he can go on to develop an understanding of the chain of interdependent causations, and then to the discovery that the body is also a vehicle in the experience of bliss. Thus here in the *Visuddhimagga* the dual vision of the body is clearly proposed as a repugnant sack of impurities and as a rare and unique vessel for attaining the bliss of Enlightenment.

THE CHANGE FROM EARTH TO SKY BURIAL IN TIBET & THE INTRODUCTION OF *GCOD* & *ZHI BYED* IN THE 11TH CENTURY

Several studies on death rituals in Tibet under the Spu rgyal empire and later during the 'Latter Diffusion' (*phyi dar*) have been published, and yet as far as far as the author knows, and she stands to be corrected, the radical transformation of Tibetan funerary practice from burial in tombs to sky burial has hardly been addressed, due partly to the difficulty of carrying out archaeological investigation *in situ*. Yet the change that took place was of great economic, cultural, and above all symbolic significance, and from any point of view it cannot have been an easy transition.[34]

Burial in the earth, i.e., in tombs and tumuli, appears from archaeological evidence to have come to an end in the Tibetan world

[34] See Lalou 1952, Tucci 1950, Haarh 1969, Macdonald 1971, Panglung 1988 & Guidoni 2006, which centres on the cult of relics in the Tibetan world. This has obvious connections with the disposal of the bodies of spiritual masters.

sometime between the collapse of the Spu rgyal Empire (ca. 846 CE) and the beginning of the 'Latter Diffusion', the *phyi dar*, in the late 10th or into the 11th centuries. This period is called the 'Fragmentation of Tibet' (*bod sil bu'i dus skabs*) about which little is known.[35] Thus during the most obscure period of Tibetan history, burial in tombs in the earth appears to have been replaced by air or sky burial which in Tibet even today means the stripping of the flesh and the crushing of the bones and the offering of everything (except those parts that are of special value such as skulls for ritual use or organs that can be used to diagnose the reason for death) to vultures and other wild creatures. Archaeologists inside Tibet today link this important social transformation not with foreign Sassanian and Sogdian practices, but with the introduction and rapid spread of *gcod* and *zhi byed* practices from India in the 11th century. Indeed, on several occasions, I have heard archaeologists discussing this matter when on field trips, especially when we have passed by or visited the necropoli that are scattered here and there on the mountain sides. They confirm that the ancient practice of burying the dead in tombs and man-made mausolea must have fallen into disuse between the collapse of the empire and the early centuries of the Latter Diffusion. They also observe that there is little evidence of other means of disposing of the bodies of ordinary human beings from that time on, and suggest—as already mentioned—that the change may be due the teachings of Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas (d. 1117) and his disciples Skyo ston shakya ye shes, Bsod nams bla ma, and Ma gcig lab sgron (1155–1253) and the spreading of *gcod* throughout Central Tibet already during their lifetimes.

It is well known that the *gcod* ritual is a symbolic offering of one's own body to all the demonic forces in the universe, to get rid of fear, attachment and ego-clinging. The practitioner imagines his or her body being cut up and offered fresh or cooked by internal combustion and exponentially increased until the bounteous flow of greasy soup, blood and flesh, manages to satisfy all the ghoulish hosts of the trichiliocosm who are invited to the feast. Furthermore, the powerful and enchantingly beautiful ritual recalls in many ways the cutting up of the ordinary human body and its offering to vultures and other wild creatures in Tibet.

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[35] See Stoddard 2004 for a detailed account pieced together from early sources covering the period of Fragmentation and the beginning of the *phyi dar*.

SOURCES OF *ZHI BYED* & *GCOD*

Like the dual view of the precious but impermanent human body, the origins of *gcod* go right back, in historical terms, to the earliest Buddhist teachings. The practice of giving or 'generosity' (Tib. *sbyin pa,* Skt. *dāna*) to the *sangha* or to poor beggars, but especially that of giving one's everything, one's family and possessions, one's own body, and even one's own life for the sake of other living beings, is found in many early sources.

In the *Jātaka*, several episodes illustrate the principle of generosity towards other living beings such as the story of *Prince Mahabodhisattva who gave his body to the Hungry Tigress*.[36] This example is represented as an actual physical offering, an act of selfless compassion towards the starving tigress. To save the lives of the mother and her cubs the *bodhisattva* dashes his body on the rocks below and is actually physically consumed.

The early *Vajracchedika*, or *Diamond Cutter Sūtra*, datable to circa 40 CE, is one of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts that are evoked as a source for this practice, while the *Small Treatise on Cutting off the Ego*, by the Indian philosopher Aryadeva, was one of the basic texts taught in Tibet by Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas.[37]

The act of giving, as codified in the Bodhisattva vehicle, is the first of the 'Six Transcendental Wisdoms' that find their origins in early Mahayana Buddhism. It is this *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, going back to the beginning of the Common Era, that is the main source of inspiration for Pha Dam pa's teachings, and for Ma cig herself, from her early childhood onwards. In the context of this practice, we find several different categories of giving representing an evolution from the direct physical act. For example, in the life story of Mi la ras pa (1040–1123) and in the Rnying ma pa commentary to the preparatory practices (*sngon 'gro*), as described in the *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung* by Rdza dpal sprul (1808–1887), the total act of offering up one's 'body, speech and mind' to the lama is presented a prerequisite, within the context of the lama and disciple relationship, for receiving the full transmission of teachings.

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[36] See Kshemendra 2001 for a version of *Prince Mahabodhisattva who gave his body to the Hungry Tigress* (*Stag mo lus byin*). This is a new French translation of a 19th c. Tibetan version of Kshemendra's *Bodhisattvavadanakalpalata*, (Tib. *Rtogs brjod dpag bsam 'khri shing*), *La liane magique*, ch. XCV, "Le Bodhisattva et la tigresse", 507–10, translated by the Padmakara Translation Committee.

[37] See Yuyama 1998.

The first example mentioned by Rdza dpal sprul is that of the *bodhisattva* called ‘Always Crying’, Rtag tu ngu, who makes a symbolic offering, rather than a practical one. He cuts up his own body—on the advice of Indra, ‘King of the gods’—as an offering to his guru in order to obtain the precious *Prajñāpāramitā* teachings that he longs for because he has nothing else to give. The gruesome offering is described in full physical detail, but once complete, his limbs are magically restored. This is close to the ultimate *dāna-pāramitā*, the absolute act of generosity as described in the *gcod* tradition, in which one's own body and one's ego, is mentally offered as a feast to all the demonic forces in the trichiliocosm. However, these are ultimately nothing more than one's own mental projections, and the terror at losing one’s own body and self.

This mental offering of one’s whole being is made in order to bring about a profound change in understanding, a realisation that the ego and the human body are composite, perishable, impermanent entities. The process takes the practitioner along the rapid path, beyond the usual conventional states of fear, suffering and attachment, into the full state of compassion for all living beings, the awareness that is the ultimate ‘Mother of all Buddhas’, the ‘Perfection of Wisdom’.

THE ‘FOUR DEMONS’ MARA

It is clear from Ma cig’s life that the “Four Demons” chapter in the *Prajñāpāramitā* was the decisive text that precipitated her understanding of the nature of the cycle of existence. These “Four Demons” are explained in the section at the end of her life story, in chapter four on the *Zhu lan* or “Dialogues” with her disciples. It was her disciple, Gangs pa mug gsang who asked about the “precise meaning of the so-called ‘demons’”.[38] The following is a résumé. She explained:

> What we call demons are not entities that exist materially with huge black forms, who terrify all those who see them. By demons we mean all those things that prevent us from attaining Liberation. That is why even our dear, loving friends and companions are potential demons on the path to Liberation. In particular, there is no worse demon than the attachment to the Ego, and as long as we have not cut this asunder, it allows all kinds of demons to raise their ugly heads. One must put all

[38] See Chos kyi seng ge & Gang pa 1992: 344–78; see also Harding 2003: 36–37, 117–22, where she uses a slightly different terminology.

> one's energy into mastering the means that make us capable of 'Cutting off Ego-clinging'.
>
> The three demons that derive from this Ego-clinging or Self-cherishing must also be destroyed, thus bringing the number to four.
>
> Here are their names:
>
> 1) The tangible demons: attraction or repulsion towards physical phenomena, taking them as real, *thogs bcas kyi bdud*
>
> 2) The intangible demons: attraction or repulsion towards mental phenomena, attachment to subject and object in the mind, *thogs med kyi bdud*
>
> 3) The demon of exaltation and pride (the showing of proud pleasure on the outside): which is like a dream or a magic illusion, that is of mental attachment to one's own worldly reputation and fame, and which distracts the mind from its true nature, *dga' brod kyi bdud*.
>
> 4) The demon of arrogance, *snyems byed kyi bdud*.
>
> This last one is the origin of the other three, and is another way of talking about Ego-clinging. This clinging to the reality of the Ego creates all kinds of torments and emotions in the mind, due to thinking that phenomena, good or bad, are real.
>
> Thus when there is the Ego there are demons. But when there is no more Ego, there are no more demons. When there is no more Ego, there is nothing left to cut asunder, and there is no longer any fear or terror. Thus through the liberation from extremes, the consciousness of Primordial Wisdom causes our understanding of all objects of knowledge to develop, and we become free from the Four Demons. This is the Fruit.

One verse from the "Precious Short Version of the *Prajñāpāramitā*", the *Prajñāpāramitā-ratna-guna-samuccaya-gatha*, or the *Phar phyin bsdus pa rin po che*—found translated into Tibetan already in the 8th to 9th centuries—is given as particularly relevant for understanding *gcod*:

> For four reasons, the four Maras, cannot overcome or make tremble the *bodhisattva* who is learned and powerful,

> He (or she) who dwells in Emptiness without abandoning living beings,
> practising exactly as is said, and being blessed by the Tathagata.[39]

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE FUNERAL RITES OF THE FOUNDERS OF *GCOD*

The practice of *gcod* spread rapidly inside Tibet from the 11th and 12th centuries onwards, being adopted by all the new and old schools of Buddhism as well as Bon. But is it possible or even rational to impute this radical change to the assimilation of the Buddhist 'perfection of giving' by the Tibetan people at large? Did this difficult and esoteric practice—considered to be one of the most dangerous and advanced paths in Buddhism—affect Tibetan society to such a degree that ordinary people began to cut up the bodies of their nearest and dearest and offer them to vultures and jackals? If this be the case then why did it not happen in other Buddhist countries in Asia? Furthermore, if this truly is the case, then a look at the final moments in the *rnam thar* of both Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas and Ma cig lab sgron would surely be revealing! Indeed they do turn out to be revealing, but in other ways.

The chapter devoted to the passing away of Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas in his monastery in Ding ri glang 'khor, where he had been living for the past twenty-one years, is long and detailed, covering fifty-six pages in his *rnam thar*.[40] It includes last advice to various disciples, the distribution of his possessions, descriptions of different stages in the funerary arrangements and the aftermath. Thus after Pha Dam pa had passed away, his main disciples and all the ordinary men and women of Glang skor gathered together to make a great offering and prayers lasting for several days. Then some discussion took place regarding what should be done with the body.[41] Lama Ghurnasri told them that Pha Dam pa had indicated that he wished them to eat his mortal remains! As a realised *siddha*, his body presented the rare opportunity of absorbing the precious transmuted substance that

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[39] rgyu rnams bzhi yis byang chub sems dpa' mkhas stobs ldan/
bdud bzhis thub par dka' zhing bskyod par mi nus te/
stong par gnas dang sems can yongs su mi gtong dang/
ji skad smras bzhin byed dang bde gshegs byin rlabs can/

[40] Chos kyi seng ge & Gang pa 1992: 108–65.

[41] This is not an unusual procedure. Discussion often takes place before decision, especially with regard to lamas or other holy persons.

brings one rapidly to enlightenment "by force, even if one is a great sinner".[42]

However, "as they were getting ready to eat his flesh, no-one dared stick the knife in". By that time, Dam pa('s *rnam shes*) had reached U rgyan in the west, where he announced that he had left his body in Ding ri. So three yogins from the Land of the *Ḍākinī* of U rgyan who had attained magical powers went off to collect it. However (Pha Dam pa's disciple) Bla ma rdzong pa prevented them.

> Then at that place (Dingri) they constructed a container for the bones of the deceased (*gdung khang* viz. *osothek*?)[43] eighteen *khri rkang* high,[44] each side measuring five fathoms[45] wide. They did not build it of ordinary wood, but made a great structure of sandalwood,[46] silk, medicinal butter, molasses, sugar, gold, silver and pearls. When they wanted to 'invite' the body (*sku gdung*) none of the great disciples dared touch it, for they loved him too much. So they just left it there, and on the evening of the 16th day they saw that the *ḍākinī* had taken it to the *gdung khang*. There the disciples prepared 108 *maṇḍala*, but since the basic *maṇḍala* of Sarvavid Vairocana was not amongst them, the *ḍākinī* caused one to appear. However, again no one dared set fire to it. So the *ḍākinī* who dwell in the pure realms lit the fire of wisdom, while Pha dam pa made fire emerge from the glorious *be'u* (calf skin sack?) of his, the great being's heart (*dam pa rang gi thugs ka'i skyes bu chen po'i mtshan dpal gyi be'u nas*). Simultaneously the two ignited and caught fire…
>
> When they began to collect the bones (*sku gdung*) and the *śarira* (*ring bsrel*) they found all kinds of marvellous 'supports' including one 'man-load' of *śarira* … The scholar Tum bu sgom pa found an image of Prajñāpāramitā that had appeared in his skull bone. Smon lam 'od

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[42] Chos kyi seng ge & Gang pa 1992: 159: *sku sha de dngos grub kyi rdzas khyad par can yin pas dri bzang gi zan dang sbyar te ril bu yungs kar gyi 'bru tsam byas nas sems can su'i khar reg kyang/ sdig po che yang btsan thabs su sangs rgya ba yin gsungs pa/.* See pp.148–60 on the subject of his body.

[43] It may be possible to propose a resonance between Tibetan and Sogdian terminology here, based on the term *osothek*, 'coffer or depot for bones', as given by Grenet. In Tibetan, *gdung khang*, usually translated 'reliquary', means literally 'house for bones of the deceased'. *Gdung* has a wide range of meanings, but the basic one is 'bones or remains of a deceased person' (Das 1979: 660); *khang* means house or containing structure.

[44] In the *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, *khri rkang* is "higher than *khru gang*"! *Khru gang* is the measure from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger.

[45] 1 *'dom* = six feet according to Das.

[46] Sandalwood (*tsan dan*) is often used in Tibetan texts to refer to precious wood. The original pillars and beams in the temple at Glang 'khor that is still standing today, appear to be made of juniper. According to the present author and the village yogins, they must date back to the time of Pha Dam pa.

> found an image of Bhaisajyaguru. The Nepalese Bhalabharo found a right turning conch (*dung*) from the *urna* between his eyebrows. Rtsa ba rgya sgom pa found a *dpal gyi be'u*. Vajrakhrodha found two letters, *hūm* and *hrī* on his fingerbone. Ma jo rgur chung ma found the letters *hūm* on each of his four incisor teeth (*mche ba*). Phyar chung ma found the consonants on his right rib bones. Ston pa chos seng found the vowels on his left rib bones. Rdzong pa found a vajra and bell that had appeared on his feet, *zhabs sor* (or toe bones?)……The ashes were divided into five parts. Rgya sgom took one part and one-third of his skull which he placed in the Ke ru stupa in front of the Zur khang. ….This later came to be called the Golden Temple (*gser khang*).[47]

It would appear from this narrative that there was a general free-for-all on the part of the disciples who gathered up different bits of bone on the site of the cremation. These are clearly distinct from the *ring srel*.

A bit later on, three Indian disciples of Pha Dam pa turned up saying they had heard about him showing signs of dying and so they had come running. When they were told that he had been cremated they exclaimed in great sadness: "Oh you unfortunate Tibetans! What a great waste!". On being asked why, they declared that by cremating his body they had prevented themselves from benefiting numerous beings, explaining as mentioned above, the miraculous liberating powers of the flesh of a *mahāsiddha*.[48]

Pha Dam pa's most celebrated female disciple, Ma cig lab sgron, passed away thirty-six years later at the age of ninety-eight/ninety-nine, in the mid-12th century. Accounts of her last moments are brief and do not really refer to her body. The text translated by Jérome Edou from the *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsal byed,* describes her disappearing in a rainbow light:

> Her body shone with a blaze of pink light that emanated like sun rays, and then it rose about one cubit into space, from where she spoke…Three times with a thundering voice she spoke the syllable PHAT. Then without moving away from the essence of reality, her mind left her body through the brahmanic aperture and in a rainbow disappeared into the vastness of space. Thus she departed into the expanse of suchness.[49]

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[47] Chos kyi seng ge & Gang pa 1992: 153–54.

[48] Chos kyi seng ge & Gang pa 1992: 158–60. Indeed the author heard that at one point following the Chinese invasion in 1951 or during the uprising in 1959 or during the Cultural Revolution(?), the shrine to Rje Tsong kha pa in Dga' ldan monastery was broken open. His mummy was then boiled in one of the great tea cauldrons and the soup was handed round to all the monks, and his body consumed, as a means of protection against the Chinese.

[49] Edou 1996: 169–70.

Earlier on in the same text, Ma cig describes in detail the circumstances of her previous death in India, as the pandit Pranidhana-siddhi. She describes the perfect preservation of the whole body and the relics that appeared as if they were cremated. These include numerous deities that appeared embossed in the bones on different parts of the body, in a way similar to those already described on Pha Dam pa's body.[50]

Sarah Harding writes without giving precise sources: "Machik's body passed into bliss at the age of ninety-nine", before going on to add in brackets: "(Even though Machik had never washed or done anything to her hair since birth, its fullness and other qualities were undamaged, and it was described as falling in perfect tresses. It was so black and glossy that it shone with rainbow lights)".[51]

The account in her *rnam thar* published in the same volume as that of Pha Dam pa says simply that she "passed away in peace" (*bde bar gshegs*) and perhaps this is the same source used by Harding since *bde ba* is indeed translated as bliss (*sukha*) but also as 'peace', as in the Tibetan verb cluster mentioned above, which is very close to *bde bzhin gshegs*, or *Tathāgata*.[52]

However, an illuminated manuscript entitled *Shes rab kyi pha rol du tshigs su bcad pa chen mo*, photographed by the author in 2001 in a dilapidated monastery in Ladakh and datable to approximately the 16th century[53] describes a funerary service carried out for Ma cig by her son Thod smyon bsam grub. Ma cig's body was apparently placed inside a sort of tomb structure, though this is not explicit. Here the ancient alternative term *spur khang* (house of the dead body) used from the Spu rgyal Empire and right up to the present day is employed instead of *gdung khang* ('*osothek*', or bone container).

> The mother Ma cig died, and when they built the 'tomb' (*spur khang*), her son Rgyal sras don grub, together with many disciples, circumambulated the 'tomb'. As they were doing so, he offered a full copper (vessel?) of liquid butter to the east of the 'tomb' and made a prayer to the 'four bodies'. To the south he offered seven musk pods, and made a prayer on the 'five bodies and the five qualities'. To the west of the tomb he offered six *zho* of camphor and made a prayer on

[50] Edou 1996: 160–61.
[51] Harding 2003: 101.
[52] Chos kyi seng ge & Gang pa 1992: 320.
[53] If one may judge by the fine free-hand illustrations.

> the eight qualities. To the north of the tomb he offered aloe (*a ka*/*ga ru*) and all kinds of medicines, and made a prayer on the six *pāramitā*.[54]

In the case of Ma gcig the last rite performed by her son as described in the Ladakhi text appears to combine burial in a tomb-like structure with practices that suggest the conservation of the body, thus harking back to pre-Buddhist rites in Tibet. For Pha Dam pa sangs rgyas, on the other hand, the suggestion of consuming the body as a magic Tantric ritual—the closest we come to the actual cutting up of the body—as well as the final cremation and the search for *śarira* and relic bones, points directly to Indian traditions and does not appear to be tainted in any way by possible Sogdian or Zoroastrian practices. Indeed this is not surprising in view of Pha Dam pa's origins and also the strong influx of Indian and Nepalese influence into Tibet during the early period of the *phyi dar*.

Amongst the four offerings made during Ma gcig's funeral, at least two or three, if not all, are useful in techniques of embalming or conserving the body. The tomb-like structure and the suggestion of conservation of the body hark back no doubt to pre-Buddhist Spu rgyal times and to earlier ways of treating the body in Tibet. They may also look forward to the mummification treatments that were applied to the bodies of lamas over the following millennium.

Thus we find in these descriptions of the last rites of Pha Dam pa and Ma cig a combination of different practices with regard to the body, but none apparently related to *gcod* (cutting up the body) or *bya gtor* (offering it to vultures). Since they are both lamas, holy beings, one might argue that this is not relevant. But do we know at present what kind of funeral rites might be offered to spiritual masters in the early *phyi dar*?

From three of the Rin chen bzang po (958–1055) *rnam thar* published together in the *Collected Biographical Material about Lo-chen Rin-chen bzang-po and his Subsequent Reembodiments* (Delhi 1977), it appears in the first text that his disciples cremated his body. No bones at all were left, and only a very few *ring srel*. However, in the third version it is mentioned that one group of *danapati* from Spiti

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[54] *A ma Ma cig grongs nas spur gzhengs pa'i dusu/ rgyal sras Don grub gyis/ a ma'i spur khang la bu slob mang po dang bcas skor ba 'dzad kyin/ spur khang gi shar phyogs nas sras kyi mar khu zangs bu gang phul nas/ sku bzhi dbyer med kyi stod pa mdzad do/ spur khang gi lho phyogs nas kyang sras kyi/ bla tsi 'gor po bdun phul nas/ sku lnga yon tan lnga'i gsol 'debs 'dzad pa lagso/ yang spur khang gi nub phyogs nas sras kyi ga bur zho drug phul nas/ yon tan brgyad gyi gsol 'debs 'dzad pa lagso/ spur khang gi byang phyogs nas sras kyi a ka ru dang sman sna tshogs phul nas/ pha rol phyin grug (drug?) gi gsol 'debs mdzad pa lags shoo// dge'o/*

suggested that his body should be kept whole, i.e., embalmed or mummified. But his disciples did not agree and went on to cremate the body (*gdung sbyang*) "in accordance with the times(?)".[55]

MUMMIES: THE 'WHOLE BODY' (*RIL PO*)

Before drawing some general conclusions with regard to the main theme presented here, that of 'décharnement' or the stripping of flesh from the bones, and its origins outside Tibet, the author would like to tell a contemporary story with regard to the last means of deposing of the bodies of religious masters, i.e., that of mummification.

This technique lies at the other extremity with regard to the Tibetan practice of sky burial during which the whole body is cut up and consumed by creatures. It also stands in contrast to the gathering up of the bones by the Sogdians after 'décharnement', and to the gathering of *śarira* and other pieces of sacred bone after cremation in India and Tibet. This sophisticated technique employs procedures destined to keep the 'whole' body (*ril po*) well conserved. Two different means are employed, the first being the best and dependant upon a high level of practice on the part of the occupant of the body:

1) a slow process of auto-mummification operated by the practitioner during the months or years preceding death, using diverse techniques of fasting, grouped under the term 'taking the essence', *bcud len*.

2) mummification of the body after death, through special treatment designed to prevent its putrification.

The dry and cool atmosphere of Tibet provided ideal conditions for such practices, and in two recently discovered cases on the edge of or far beyond the high plateau but within the context of Tibetan Buddhism, techniques of auto-mummification are apparent.[56]

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[55] Rin chen bzang po 1977: 191, 274 and 419. *Spi ti sbyin bdag khag thams cad tshogs nas sku gdung ril por bzhugs dgos zhes nan cher zhu ba phul yang dus kyi skabs dang stun sgril zhus pas bya rgyu legs par 'bab/*

[56] Two documentaries shown on television in 2005, respectively in England and in France, attempt to understand and analyse the death process of two yogins whose well preserved bodies have been found in areas where Tibetan Buddhism is widespread, in the Himalayas and in Mongolia.

On several occasions during talks with Prof. Dung dkar Blo bzang phrin las in Lhasa in the 1990s, he referred to the relatively large number of mummified bodies of lamas that came out of smashed stupas during the Cultural Revolution. Since he did construction work for many years he was often invited to inspect and deal with them, once fishing one out of a river, and another time (in Bsam yas, if I remember rightly), he was surprised to find that the skin was soft to the touch, just like that of a child. He also told the author that he had written a manuscript on the subject, but this is not yet published. He too mentioned how it was considered important to keep the body 'whole', as with Rje Tsong kha pa and other renowned lamas.

The mummy of another well-known 15th century figure, the artist Sman bla don grub, appeared out of a stupa in the same way in 1966. It was in good condition and was carried off and hidden by two villagers who re-enshrined it about thirty-five years later, observing only that the body was 'whole' with the exception of one femur that had been removed at an uncertain time.

About ten years ago I heard a marvellous story from a very reliable source on an illustrious mummy that was 'rediscovered' by the Chinese authorities in the 1980s. If it is true, it is marvellous indeed in its sophistication, and if it is false, the imagination of the teller is just as marvellous, revealing the rich creativity of the Tibetan world view. With this story we shall end this preamble into the different methods Tibetans have employed to dispose of the bodies of their dead:

> In the 1980s when the Potala Palace was under reconstruction, it was closed for a period of seven or eight years. During that time, large-scale investigations were made and according to widespread rumour, considerable amounts of treasures were removed by night and taken away in lorries down to China. Only Han archaeologists and a very few carefully selected Tibetan specialists were allowed on site. At one point in their investigations they decided to commit the ultimate sacrilege. They were going to open the huge golden stupa of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), the *Rdzam gling rgyan gcig*, One Ornament of the World, built under orders from his regent Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705)[57]. When they opened the hermetically sealed lattice window on the front and stepped inside, to everyone's great surprise, the Dalai Lama was not sitting enthroned as a golden mummy swathed in silks. Instead, they saw that the large *bum pa* (the vase shaped

[57] *Rdzam gling rgyan gcig gi dkar chag*, account of the building of the 5th Dalai Lama's funerary stupa by Sde srid Sang rgyas rgya mtsho, New Delhi 1973 (no publisher's name given). See Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1990 for another edition of the same work.

> chamber just below the pinnacle of the stupa where they were now crouching) had been turned into a scholar's study. Inside, the Dalai Lama was sitting at a low table, dressed in a simple brown chuba, poised with pen in hand, in the act of writing. All around were books and the effects of a learned man. His skin was soft to touch and there were no signs of decay. The Chinese left an appropriate seal on his desk and resealed the chamber. A little while later, a Tibetologist woman colleague from Eastern Europe was invited to take part in an extraordinary discovery in the Potala. She would be present at a unique moment. The very first opening of the tomb of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. It is said that unfortunately she declined, for the price was too high….[58]

CONCLUSION

The general conclusion made here concerning the main theme of the paper, i.e., the origins of sky burial in Tibet, is that based on Franz Grenet's research a sufficient number of elements confirm a close connection between Zoroastrian and Tibetan practices of 'stripping the flesh from the bones', with an historic link through the neighbouring land of Sogdiana at the time of the expansion of the Tibetan empire of Spu rgyal. In the Middle East and in the Iranian world this custom disappeared progressively around the time of the first millennium CE due to the arrival of Islam. However, in Tibet— the most easterly region to which the practice spread—it is this technique that became the most widespread means of disposal of the dead from that time onwards right down to the present day. Indeed it may be said that sky burial has become one of the defining characteristics of Tibetan civilisation.

On the other hand, although direct historic links between this form of disposal of bodies and the introduction of the *gcod* ritual from India in the 11th century remain to be established, it is suggested here that both practices stand in perfect conceptual harmony with each other. The originally Zoroastrian Middle Eastern practice of 'stripping the flesh' and offering it to birds and wild beasts came to be seen in Tibet, alone of all Buddhist countries, as partaking of the fundamental Buddhist vision of the impermanence of phenomena and as an ultimate gesture in the *dāna-pāramitā*, or the 'perfection of giving'. It

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[58] If this story is true, the opening and the resealing of the chamber would no doubt bring about a drastic change in the atmosphere leading to spontaneous disintegration of organic matter inside the tomb.

was accepted all the more easily in Tibet because environmental conditions allowed for only limited use of cremation whilst changing climatic conditions and new conceptual considerations acted as deterrents to the earlier practice of the burial of the dead. Ultimately, the overlapping time period of the arrival of 'décharnement' from the northwest and that of *gcod* from the south created an effect, a sort of merger, which turned into symbiosis within the collective consciousness of the increasingly Buddhicised population. Thus over the last millennium both practices have become highly supportive of each other within the great eclectic tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet.

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TO BE OR NOT TO BE CELIBATE: MORALITY AND CONSORT PRACTICES ACCORDING TO THE TREASURE REVEALER SE RA MKHA' 'GRO'S (1892–1940) AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS[1]

SARAH JACOBY

At least since the time of the eleventh-century Indian Buddhist master Atiśa, tensions have simmered within Tibetan Buddhist religious communities between the competing religious dictums of celibacy and religiously sanctioned forms of sexuality.[2] Whereas Tibetan monastic apologists have attempted to aestheticise explicit mention of sexuality in Tantric scriptures and initiations by metaphorically or symbolically interpreting their erotic content, non-celibate religious practitioners including Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) have maintained vestiges of a more literal interpretation of practices involving sexuality.[3]

While the dividing lines between celibate and non-celibate Tibetan religious specialists may initially appear clear, the borders between the two have often been far from it. On the one hand, there are certain instances when celibate monastics from the Rnying ma School may engage in sexuality. For example, according to Bdud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje's (1904–1988) commentary on Mnga' ri pan chen padma dbang gi rgyal po's (1487–1542) *Ascertaining the Three Vows* (*Sdom gsum rnam nges*), if a monk has sexual intercourse that is

[1] This paper was presented at the 11th IATS, Bonn in August 2006 but is published in this volume. Many thanks to those who provided valuable editorial comments on earlier versions of this essay including Georges Dreyfus, Anne Klein, Lama Tsundru Sangpo, Antonio Terrone, Tulku Thondup, and Gray Tuttle.

[2] See Davidson 1995 for a translation of Atiśa's *A Lamp for the Path to Awakening* in which Atiśa addresses these issues.

[3] Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) are religious specialists thought to be incarnations of the eighth-century Indian Tantric master Padmasambhava's original twenty-five disciples. They discover religious Treasures (*gter*) thought to be hidden in the earth and sky of Tibet by Padmasambhava and occasionally other imperial Tibetan personages. These Treasures include sacred substances called earth Treasures (*sa gter*) such as scriptures, statues, ritual objects, and vessels containing scriptures and mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*), which are visions in which *bodhisattvas* bestow teachings upon the Treasure revealer. For more information on Treasures and the complex processes involved in their revelation, see Thondup 1986 and Gyatso 1993; 1996.

unstained by desire in which he is able to perceive both subject and object as male and female wisdom deities, to transform his desire into the recognition of great bliss, and to transform his loss of seminal fluid and his attachment into primordial wisdom awareness, then his act is not a violation of any of his vows.[4] On the other hand, there are several instances of Treasure revealers who chose to be celibate monastics despite the strong connection between successful Treasure revelation and engaging with the appropriate prophesied consort—three recent examples of celibate Treasure revealers from Eastern Tibet are A ’dzoms rgyal sras pad ma dbang rgyal (b. 1971) of Re khe dgon chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling in the Chab mdo region, Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs (1933–2004) of Bla rung sgar in Gser rta County, and Se ra yang sprul (1925–1988) of Se ra theg chen chos ’khor gling, also in Gser rta.[5]

The purpose of this article is to explore this tension between celibate and non-celibate interpretations of ideal Tibetan religious conduct through the biographical and autobiographical writings of the most prolific female author and Treasure revealer in Tibetan history, Se ra mkha’ ’gro (1892–1940).[6] In her 400-plus Tibetan folio-page autobiography and her 248 folio-page biography of her teacher and male partner Dri med ’od zer (1881–1924), one of the eight sons of the prominent nineteenth-century Treasure revealer Bdud ’joms gling pa, Se ra mkha’ ’gro grapples with questions as relevant in today’s Tibet as in centuries past such as: 1) What is the relative value of the moral superiority of celibacy and the expedient means of religious practices involving sexuality? 2) Under what circumstances, if any, is it acceptable for a celibate monastic to participate in consort practices? 3) How can the dividing line between conventional lust and spiritually-beneficial sexuality be distinguished? And finally, a question that has received far less attention in the predominantly male-authored Tibetan Treasure literature: 4) Should a female Treasure revealer engage with multiple partners as many male Treasure

[4] Bdud ’joms rin po che 1996 [date of Tibetan authorship 1984]: 142, 144.

[5] See Germano 1998 for a description of Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshog and Bsod nams nyi ma 1994 for a detailed biography of Se ra yang sprul.

[6] Se ra mkha’ ’gro signed her Treasure revelations (*gter chos*) and her autobiography using her Treasure name (*gter ming*) Bde ba’i rdo rje. She also sometimes used the name Chos nyid kun bzang bde skyong dbang mo. The epithet ‘Se ra mkha’ ’gro’ (‘The *Ḍākinī* of Se ra’) derives from the time she spent later in her life at Se ra theg chen chos ’khor gling in Gser rta County, Mgo log. In the Tibetan diaspora, many people know Se ra mkha’ ’gro by this name, although in Mgo log another epithet, Dbus bza’ mkha’ ’gro (‘The *Ḍākinī* Princess from Central Tibet’), is more common.

revealers did for the sake of their revelations or should she live as a nun?

Se ra mkha' 'gro was an exceptional woman in many ways, not the least of which was her authorship of one of the few and longest female-authored autobiographies in Tibetan literature.[7] However, we can read the tensions her biographical writing exhibits between celibate and non-celibate interpretations of religious conduct as indicative of broader tensions in her early twentieth-century religious communities in the Mgo log region of Eastern Tibet. In Se ra mkha' 'gro's day the Mgo log religious landscape was comprised primarily of two types of communities: 1) religious encampments (*chos sgar*) centred on charismatic Treasure revealers who lived in yak hair tents and often travelled together on pilgrimage and on alms-seeking journeys and 2) monasteries (*dgon*), which were sedentary institutions housing celibate monks and nuns. Both *sgar* and *dgon* competed with each other for the patronage of the nomadic laity of Mgo log, offering ritual services in exchange for resources such as silver coins, butter, barley, milk, yogurt, and animal hides. However, monasteries and religious encampments centred on Treasure revealers were not separate religious spheres, but rather overlapping ones. Charismatic non-celibate Treasure revealers were sometimes abbots of monasteries housing celibate monks, and the mobile religious encampments affiliated with them included not only non-celibate practitioners, but also monastics.[8] The proximity and differing codes of conduct of these two forms of religious community inform the tensions regarding

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[7] Se ra mkha' 'gro's autobiography, which she completed in approximately 1934, is titled *Dbus mo bde ba'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa nges 'byung 'dren pa'i shing rta skal ldan dad pa'i mchod sdong* (*The Biography of the Central Tibetan Woman bde ba'i rdo rje: A Reliquary for Fortunate and Faithful Ones [Serving as] a Chariot Leading to Renunciation*), henceforth abbreviated as DDNT. The manuscript is unpublished and the 407 folio-page version I quote in this paper was lent to me by Bya bral sangs rgyas rdo rje in Pharping, Nepal. I have also found another 526 folio-page version of the unpublished manuscript (written on smaller pages) in Gser rta County, Dkar mdzes Prefecture, which is written in different handwriting although to date I have noticed no differences in content. Up to now, Se ra mkha' 'gro's autobiography has been a rare document, preserved only by her lineage holders and their descendants in Ri bo che, Dkar mdzes, Gser rta, and in the Tibetan diaspora. The autobiography will soon be more accessible, as 'Ju skal bzang intends to publish the Dkar mdzes manuscript version of Se ra mkha' 'gro's autobiography under the name *Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro ma'i rnam thar* as part of the Mgo log dpe rnying dpe tshogs series produced by the Mgo log khul mi rigs skad yig bya ba'i gzhung las khang.

[8] For further information on Treasure revealers and their roles in the social landscape of early-twentieth-century Mgo log, see Jacoby 2007: 109-29 and Jacoby forthcoming.

whether or not to be celibate apparent in both Se ra mkha' 'gro's rendition of her own life and that of Dri med 'od zer.

One factor that strengthens our ability to read Se ra mkha' 'gro's auto/biographical writing as a resource for a social history of the early twentieth-century Eastern Tibetan religious encampments in which she lived is the dialogical style of her writing. She expresses the story of her own and Dri med 'od zer's spiritual liberation through direct-speech interactions with members of their communities and with a host of supermundane beings who appeared before them in their visions (*nyams snang*). We can conclude that the subjects about which Se ra mkha' 'gro's interlocutors frequently debated—such as whether or not to engage in consort practices, whether or not to take monastic vows, and whether or not monks could have secret relations with consorts—were subjects of broader import beyond the pages of Se ra mkha' 'gro's writings and in the communities about and for which she wrote, which were primarily Zlar tshang and Se ra Monastery in Gser rta County, Dkar mdzes Autonomous Prefecture, and Ban nag in Padma County, Mgo log Autonomous Prefecture.[9]

The most prominent voices pressing their injunctions upon Se ra mkha' 'gro and Dri med 'od zer were those of the *ḍākinīs* that appeared before them in their visions, whose prophecies urged them to seek the appropriate consorts necessary for their revelations regardless of their misgivings. Both Se ra mkha' 'gro and Dri med 'od zer (in Se ra mkha' 'gro's rendition of his life) yearned to become celibate monastics at various times, but both of them were rebuffed by the zealous *ḍākinīs* who insisted they stay true to the more complicated path of being non-celibate Treasure revealers. *Ḍākinīs* thus provided the divine backing that allowed Se ra mkha' 'gro to represent herself as morally upright and non-celibate at the same time as they insisted that Dri med 'od zer's role in the Mgo log religious landscape was to be a non-celibate Treasure revealer. Although *ḍākinīs* exhorted Se ra mkha' 'gro to engage with the appropriate consorts to fulfil her spiritual purposes, Se ra mkha' 'gro's writing makes it clear that not everyone in her quotidian world shared their lofty point of view. The

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[9] The terrain in which Se ra mkha' 'gro lived the majority of her life straddles the border between the Eastern Tibetan regions of A mdo and Khams, or the contemporary border between the northern part of Sichuan Province and the southern part of Qinghai Province, PRC. The three main communities in which she lived were 1) Dri med 'od zer's father Bdud 'joms gling pa's seat Zlar tshang dgon in Gser rta County (GPS N: 32 47.505 ft. E: 100 04.097 ft. elevation 13,711 ft.), 2) Mgar ra gter ston bdud 'dul dbang phyug gling pa's seat Ban nag dgon in Padma County (GPS N: 32 54.129 ft. E: 100 46.338 ft. elevation 11,924 ft.), and 3) Se ra theg chen chos 'khor gling in Gser rta (GPS N: 32 28.703 ft. E: 99 50.441 ft. elevation 13,407 ft.).

many altercations she recounts between herself and those in her communities who doubted her intentions for not being a nun, as well as the negative gossip she repeatedly mentions swirling around her and her activities in and around monasteries and monks, highlights that her social position as “neither a nun nor a laywoman” (*jo min nag min*) was at times a controversial one.

Though monks can technically engage in sexual intercourse as a part of meditation practice as long as it is unstained by desire according to Bdud ’joms rin po che’s interpretation of Mnga’ ri pan chen’s Three Vow (*dom gsum*) literature, Se ra mkha’ ’gro most often recounts being solicited by monks not for the purpose of their spiritual enlightenment but for the sake of removing obstacles to their health and longevity. Thus, the moral superiority of monastics’ maintaining pure celibacy vows sometimes contradicted the perceived benefits of consort practices, which most often pertained to curing illness. In Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s autobiographical writing, the onus often fell upon her, with the aid of prophecies, to determine who was and was not an appropriate consort. When potential male consorts were monks, Se ra mkha’ ’gro invariably rejected the possibility that they could be appropriate consorts for her. However, *ḍākinīs* and male ecclesiastic hierarchs whose voices interweave with her own had other ideas about the relative balance between maintaining monks’ celibacy and gathering the auspicious connections necessary for Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s successful Treasure revelation. We can read this dual motion in Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s autobiography between her adamant refusals to have consort relationships with monks and the repeated prophecies that seem to call for just that as Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s way of striking a careful balance between representing herself as morally virtuous and as a woman who engaged in the esoteric consort practices to which Bdud ’joms rin po che’s commentary alludes. Though there may have been scriptural precedence for monks with high levels of spiritual realisation to engage with female consorts, from Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s writing we see that at least equally important to the participants’ inner motivations was the way in which their actions were perceived by their communities, whose judgments were vital to the success and propagation of religious lineages such as that of Se ra mkha’ ’gro. I suggest that Se ra mkha’ ’gro was acutely aware of her audience, whom she describes as her disciples and those who would become disciples in the future, and it is for their benefit that we read about her refusal to break monks’ vows and about the tenuous balance she

struck between upholding the virtue of celibacy and the efficacy of religiously sanctioned sexuality.

PART I: TO BE OR NOT TO BE A NUN

Se ra mkha' 'gro recounts wanting to renounce the world and live as a religious hermit from her earliest childhood. But her religious inspirations were almost immediately at loggerheads with her family's plans for her to follow in her father's footsteps as a political leader (*dpon mo*). Se ra mkha' 'gro was born in Lhasa in 1892 to a Mongolian father of royal ancestry named Lha sras Byams pa mgon po who was a Qing official[10] in Lhasa and a Tibetan mother of the Gnubs clan named Tshe ring chos 'dzom. Though her parents were devoted lay Buddhists, Se ra mkha' 'gro's devotion reached a deeper level. She writes that from the age of seven, after she failed to convince her fellow childhood playmates to recite *maṇi* prayers,

> From that time forward I renounced my attachment to my neighbours and relatives and although I had a great aspiration to go only to a secluded mountain, since I was young, aside from just going to the top and bottom of the house, I didn't dare go.[11]

After begging her mother to let her renounce the world, her mother agreed to ask her father if she was allowed to become a nun. Her father replied,

> In the astrological calculations pertaining to your former lives, it seemed as if it was unacceptable for you to be a shaven-headed nun, hence I am not sure. Let's request a divination and have a detailed conversation with Lcang grong grub thob rin po che[12] regarding what to do and we'll know.[13]

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[10] Se ra mkha' 'gro describes her father's political position as '*rgya dpon*', which I am translating as 'Qing official' because the 'Chinese' political influence in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Lhasa would most likely have been Manchu Qing and not Han Chinese, although there were some Han Chinese working in the Qing *amban* offices in Lhasa at this time (see Richardus 1998: 161–208). That Se ra mkha' 'gro's father was not Han Chinese is supported by the fact that she refers to him as of royal Mongolian ancestry (*sog po dbang gi gdung rgyud*).

[11] DDNT f. 11a.4–5.

[12] Se ra mkha' 'gro describes Lcang grong grub thob rin po che as the head lama of the group of 18 Qing leaders (*rgya shog dpon khag bco brgyad kyi dbu bla*) who was renowned as an incarnation of Thang stong rgyal po.

[13] DDNT f. 11b.1–2.

When the family arrived before Lcang grong grub thob rin po che and requested his guidance, the lama replied,

> Because this girl is without mistake an incarnation of Sa skya Rta mgrin dbang mo, it is not suitable for her to live either as a householder or as a nun. When the time comes, her heritage will awaken. Until then, let her reside however she is comfortable.[14]

This in-between status Lcang grong grub thob rin po che prescribed for Se ra mkha' 'gro as one who was neither householder nor nun characterised the remainder of her life, even after her heritage as a *ḍākinī* had awakened.

Although she experienced many extraordinary religious signs as a child including revealing Treasures from Brag yer pa, visions of *ḍākinīs*, and the spontaneous ability to cure those stricken by the smallpox epidemic that struck Lhasa in approximately 1903, these did nothing to stop Se ra mkha' 'gro's father from arranging a politically advantageous marriage for her when she was a young teenager to the son of another Qing leader. Despairing at the idea of being forced to marry and take on a political role and devastated by the death of her mother when she was thirteen, Se ra mkha' 'gro hatched a plan to escape from the oppressive confines of her upper-class Lhasa family, never to see them again. After spying a group of travelling pilgrims from the widow of her family's home when she was fifteen, she surreptitiously escaped from her home at night and followed the group of wild-looking pilgrims from Mgo log led by the charismatic Treasure revealer Dri med 'od zer, who would soon become the object of her greatest devotion. The pilgrimage she embarked upon with this Mgo log religious encampment (*chos sgar*) from Central Tibet to their homeland in the nomadic highlands of the Gser rta region of Mgo log brought Se ra mkha' 'gro near to dying of starvation and hypothermia. Her childhood as a member of Lhasa's nobility had scarcely prepared her for the rough existence of road travel on foot and begging for meagre sustenance, not to mention the unenthusiastic welcome that she received from her newly adopted religious community as an outsider girl from Central Tibet.[15]

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[14] DDNT ff. 11b.6–12a.1.

[15] The fact that in Mgo log she was and still is called Dbus bza' mkha' 'gro, 'The *Ḍākinī* Princess from Central Tibet', highlights the salience of her outsider status as a foreign, Central Tibetan-born woman in the Eastern terrain of Mgo log, which was a semi-independent tribal area that was never under the sovereignty of the Central Tibetan government.

Her difficulties did not end when the pilgrims reached their destination in Dri med ’od zer’s homeland of Zlar tshang in Gser rta, the main seat of his late father Bdud ’joms gling pa. No sooner had Se ra mkha’ ’gro arrived in Zlar tshang and sought shelter at Dri med ’od zer’s residence (*bla brang*) than those affiliated with Dri med ’od zer’s consort, a local Mgo log woman named A skyong bza’, refused Se ra mkha’ ’gro shelter. This was the first of a long refrain in Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s life of other women being jealous of her and excluding her from their religious communities. It seems that the young, unattached, beautiful, spiritually gifted, and ambitious Se ra mkha’ ’gro posed a threat to other women with whom she vied for the attentions of powerful male religious hierarchs and scarce economic resources.

This tension between women was not only evident between competing female consorts of important Treasure revealers, but also between Se ra mkha’ ’gro and some of the nuns with whom she interacted. For example, when Se ra mkha’ ’gro was seventeen years old and trying to extricate herself from a temporary stint as a servant girl in a Mgo log household where she ended up after being expelled from Dri med ’od zer’s residence, her employers introduced her to their relative, the nun Tshul sgron, and suggested that living with her would be conducive to Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s religious aspirations. She writes,

> “[her employer said]…At the religious encampment, since our nun Tshul sgron is there, go and live there and don’t lose our horse.”
>
> I did what he said and went to Tshul sgron’s place.
>
> [Tshul sgron] said, “Now you need to go before Sprul sku mu ra sang and cut your hair and request vows. Otherwise, you certainly won’t live at my place.”
>
> I thought that since there was a rich household of the man named Bsod bkra sang whose household didn’t belittle me and who always gave me non-meat foods from time to time whenever they had them such as rice and wild sweet potatoes and so forth, it seemed that Tshul sgron got jealous thinking that I would live with the Bsod bkra household.
>
> I said the following: “It is okay if I don’t cut my hair and take vows. It won’t harm your purity. Even when I think of the conduct of you completely pure nuns, someone like me who is young and without wealth would surely not make it on my own as a nun.”

She got mad and stood up. Having grabbed my shoulder, she led me before Mu ra sang and said "Sir, Sprul sku, please take a tuft of her hair [i.e., make her a nun]. She has gone astray from the middle [way] and although she has a pure mind, she doesn't listen to anybody and I don't know what to do with her."

The attendant said, "Wait here for a moment. Speak to him after he eats his food."

[…*Tshul sgron departs, leaving Se ra mkha' 'gro by herself in front of Sprul sku mu ra sang*…]

I waited and after the lama had his food, I said this:

"Sir, from the time I was fifteen years old, I wondered if I could accomplish the genuine Dharma. Hence, don't lessen your attention to [helping me] go on this path. Because I have a great purpose, it seems that it doesn't matter whether I cut or don't cut my hair. It was Tshul sgron's idea. If this body of mine doesn't go under the strong power of another, I will not have relationships with religious people, lay householders, and so forth if I think there's no purpose. At all times, I will see if I can accomplish benefit for myself and others. Not becoming attached to food, clothing, or wealth, I will try to accomplish pure divine Dharma. If, on account of having an inferior [female] body[16] I do not follow the path I intend to, since I am not in opposition to you, please understand my viewpoint."

Lovingly, the lama replied, "Oh, yes, not getting attached to food, clothing, and wealth and wondering if you will accomplish the pure Dharma is the same as accomplishing the Dharma. Having great attachment to cyclic existence is the same as not accomplishing the Dharma. These days religious people haven't banished cyclic existence from their minds. In the summer, they delight in butter, in the winter, they beg for barley, and at all times they are the same as those who carry pieces of a dead corpse around.[17]

He spoke about many religious topics such as this and having put a golden statue on my head, he prayed. He gave me one of seven powdered pills made from Dpal sprul rin po che's forehead and other

[16] *Lus dman*, or its longer form *skye lus dman pa*, can translate literally as 'inferior birth body', but given that its most common abbreviation, *skye dman*, is a prevalent word for 'woman' its gendered connotations are overt.

[17] *Dus rgyun du gshin po'i ro dum khur*. Tulku Thondup (interview, 5/10/08) explains this reference to "people who carry pieces of a dead corpse around" as a reference to those religious specialists who perform funerary rituals for the purposes of financial gain.

> religious medicine pills, juniper powder [blessed with] mantra, protection cords, and so forth and he gave me advice.
>
> Then, I came back and told Tshul sgron, "I promised not to have a physical relationship with lay people or with religious people without a purpose. Otherwise, I will not be a nun."
>
> She said, "Wow—it is as if you wear wild yak hide on your face [i.e., you have no shame]. Who would dare say dirty words such as these to a great lama like him?", and she pinched my cheeks.
>
> I replied, "Since I spoke about things that I am able to do, there is no 'not daring'. I wouldn't dare let my vows and precepts secretly deteriorate."
>
> She didn't say anything.[18]

This tension-filled exchange between Se ra mkha' 'gro and her would-be nun housemate Tshul sgron exemplifies the difficulties Se ra mkha' 'gro faced as an outsider with no source of income who was neither a nun with celibacy vows nor a laywoman willing to marry and be a householder. Se ra mkha' 'gro outlines multiple reasons for not being a nun in the passage above that portray both pragmatic and esoteric dimensions of her choice. On one level, Se ra mkha' 'gro worried that, "someone like me who is young and without wealth would surely not make it on my own as a nun". This in combination with her description of Tshul sgron's fear that she would steal the patronage offered by Bsod bkra sang's wealthy household demonstrate that the friction between the two women regarding the merits of celibate versus non-celibate religious life concerned not only morality, but economics.

On a more esoteric level, Se ra mkha' 'gro's promise not to "have relationships with religious people, lay householders, and so forth if I think there's no purpose", suggests that she would engage in consort relationships that did have a purpose, which for Se ra mkha' 'gro always meant a religious purpose. Though Tshul sgron criticised Se ra mkha' 'gro for saying such "dirty words" to a great lama, Se ra mkha' 'gro effectively silenced her by retorting that what is truly shameful is secretly transgressing one's vows, hinting that perhaps Tshul sgron was less morally superior than her shaved head and maroon robes suggested.

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[18] DDNT ff. 93a.4–94a.1; 94b.3–95b.4.

Thus, through passages such as this interaction between Se ra mkha' 'gro and Tshul sgron we see that the message Se ra mkha' 'gro's autobiography conveys about the relative virtues of being a nun or a non-celibate *mantrin*, as Se ra mkha' 'gro could be described, is a nuanced one. Though in her childhood she had yearned to be a nun, by the time she was seventeen, she had integrated Lcang grong grub thob rin po che's advice to her that her destiny was to be neither householder nor nun. Nevertheless, her indeterminate status as beholden to neither household nor nunnery was a lifelong source of tension. As Se ra mkha' 'gro expressed to a beautiful visionary woman who appeared before her when she was forty,

> I am called neither nun nor wife.
> I am not a nun, but I am as disciplined as a nun.
> My vows regarding the three trainings on the path[19] are without deterioration.
> Without being impure (*nag med*), I am given the name 'wife' (*nag mo*).
> As if I were impure (*nag can*), [others] expel me from the land and see me as something to abandon.
> But I don't remember having a hair's breadth of impure fault (*nag nyes pa*).[20]

Se ra mkha' 'gro's verse is a play on the deliberately parallel words for 'laywoman' (*nag mo*) and impure or negative (*nag*). She figuratively places herself in both categories of being a nun and a laywoman; she is a nun in the sense of being disciplined and she is a laywoman in the sense that others misperceive her as an impure person for having male consorts. But despite the fact that she laments the difficulties this indeterminate status brings upon her, Se ra mkha' 'gro refuses to be denigrated by others; in her autobiographical annals she staunchly admits no trace of fault.

PART II: *ḌĀKINĪ* VISIONS PROPHESY THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSORTS

A substantial aid to the confidence that Se ra mkha' 'gro felt later in life in her path as a non-celibate Treasure revealer came from the powerful and persistent presence of celestial female divinities known

[19] The three trainings on the path are discipline, concentration, and knowledge.
[20] DDNT f. 376b.1–3.

as *ḍākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro ma*) who pervade her autobiographical account. Beyond Se ra mkha' 'gro's writings, *ḍākinīs* play many important roles in the Treasure revelation process. According to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's thirteenth-century *Zangs gling ma* and 'O rgyan gling pa's fourteenth-century *Padma bka' thang*, the paradigmatic female saint of Tibet, the *Ḍākinī* Ye shes mtsho rgyal, was one "who had attained perfect recall" and who hid Padmasambhava's teachings for the sake of future generations.[21] Beyond Ye shes mtsho rgyal's memory, scribal efforts, and Treasure hiding activities, *ḍākinīs* have become increasingly closely associated with multiple aspects of the Treasure revelation process. *Ḍākinīs* often serve as Treasure guardians who protect Treasures until their designated revealer reclaims them. The scripts in which revelations appear are often special symbolic scripts called *ḍākinī* script, illegible to Treasure revealers without the aid of *ḍākinīs* to decode them. One reason why male Treasure revealers rely on female consorts who are embodiments of *ḍākinīs* is to arouse the spontaneously arisen bliss (*lhan skyes kyi dga' ba*) necessary to decode symbolic Treasure scriptures.[22] *Ḍākinīs* in the form of spiritual consorts are not the only necessary condition for a Treasure revealer to successfully reveal Treasures. Other essential conditions called 'auspicious connections' (*rten 'brel*) include being the right Treasure revealer for a particular Treasure and finding the proper time, place, and disciple (*chos bdag*) who will transmit the teaching in the future.

In Se ra mkha' 'gro's writings, *ḍākinīs* play an important role in helping to bring these tenuous conditions together because they continually provide Se ra mkha' 'gro and Dri med 'od zer with prophecies inspiring them and aiding them in gathering the requisite auspicious connections. *Ḍākinī* prophecies appear to Se ra mkha' 'gro and Dri med 'od zer in their waking and dreaming visionary life, encouraging them relentlessly to comply with Padmasambhava's command to reveal his hidden teachings. Visionary encounters with *ḍākinīs*, *bodhisattvas*, *siddhas*, and autochthonous Tibetan spirits comprise about half of both Se ra mkha' 'gro's autobiography and Dri med 'od zer's biography, but the key bearers of prophecy are *ḍākinīs*.[23] *Ḍākinīs* articulate in no uncertain terms that Se ra mkha'

[21] Tsogyal 1993: 209; Tsogyal 1978: 746.
[22] Thondup 1986: 107; 130.
[23] DDNT contains 88 visions, which comprise 46% of the text. Out of the 88 visions she describes, 55% of them are visions of female divinities, 27% of them are male divinities, and 16% include both male and female divinities (or neither in the case of formless visions and visions of animals not distinctly gendered).

’gro and Dri med ’od zer alike are not meant for celibate monasticism but rather must occupy the less clear-cut position of being non-celibate Treasure revealers. *Ḍākinīs*’ voices regularly appear to quell their attractions to the celibate life and to urge them towards cultivating consort relationships. The dialectic between *ḍākinīs*’ injunctions to engage in consort practices and Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s (and sometimes Dri med ’od zer’s) hesitancy in doing so that pervades Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s writing hints that their decision to be non-celibate religious specialists was a controversial one that needed authorisation by reliable religious sources, the lion’s share of which were the celestial *ḍākinīs* whose intentions and admonitions animate the pages of Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s works.

Dri med ’od zer’s Dilemma

Dri med ’od zer’s young life was significantly less traumatic than that of Se ra mkha’ ’gro, given that he was raised lovingly by a large family of illustrious religious personalities, both monastic and non-celibate. In particular, he was under the tutelage of his famous father Bdud ’joms gling pa (1835–1904), who was renowned throughout Mgo log for his Treasure revelations. Dri med ’od zer also spent several of his childhood years being educated by his older brother, the Third Rdo grub rin po che named ’Jigs med bstan pa’i nyi ma (1865–1926), in his monastery Rdo grub dgon pa in Padma County, Mgo log. As a young man, he returned to his father in Zlar tshang, Gser rta County, in order to receive teachings from him. Se ra mkha’ ’gro writes that when he was seventeen years old, Dri med ’od zer felt the urge to become a monk:

> Then, one day when he went to rest, he thought that it would be good if he were a monk. After a few days had passed, he went to see a great monastic *mkhan po* named Bla ma Chos rgyal who had ordained the Lord’s [Dri med ’od zer’s] holy direct disciple Bsod sprul rin po che, who was a disciple prophesied by the Precious Lama [Bdud ’joms gling pa] when he was in retreat. When he thought that he needed to become a novice monk, that night in his dream there was a woman with an ugly body who said, “Your behaviour in this degenerate age is wretched!” Saying this, she beat her chest and cried intensively.

This breakdown is similar to Dri med ’od zer’s biography (SLNT), in which visions comprise 52% of the text. Out of 80 different visions, 58% of them are of female divinities, 31% male divinities, and 10% include both male and female divinities (or are genderless, i.e., animals or formless voices).

The Lord asked, "What made you so miserable?"

She answered, "What's wrong with me crying? Look at the way people behave these days! Not only me, this old woman, but the *ḍākinīs* of sacred places and lands are displeased."

Again, the Lord asked, "Why are the *ḍākinīs* of sacred places and lands disturbed?"

She replied, "If I explain [it to you], it is as if there is no limit to what there is to explain. But if I tell you just a bit, you will come to understand your fault."

The Lord said, "What fault of mine has affected you?"

She said, "It's good if I am not affected by [your] faults. Look at the signs of this negative degenerate era—not protecting your vows to be a *mantrin* (*sngags pa*), you shave your head. Saying you are a fully ordained monk endowed with the three [vows], you enter into mantra. Although you are empowered in profound Treasures, on account of bad people, you have little courage and you let them go. These are the faults to your life as a Treasure revealer."

The Lord answered, "Even if Treasure revealers enter monastic training, how does that harm Treasures? Before, even the Lotus Guru took monastic ordination before Kun dga' bo. Having received the name Shakya seng ge, he became one with a shaved head and bare feet. Despite this, later, he guided all in the land of Tibet with Treasures."

She replied, "I know the Lotus Guru's situation. You don't. Before, when the Guru resided in the Unsurpassed [Buddhafield], I worked [for him]. From the South Western Milky [Lake], having merged with the mind of the Buddhas, he came as a self-arisen emanation body. Not relying on the gradual grounds and paths, he had all the knowledge of what to reject and accept. As a sign that he had attained mastery over all the knowledge of supernatural perception and primordial wisdom, he became sovereign as the King of O rgyan and then he took the noble 'Od 'chang lha mo as his wife. Having collected all the heroes and heroines of the sacred places and lands under his power, he overpowered the three realms of existence. Then, he resided as a *yogi* who behaved as an ascetic. Having practised asceticism in eight charnel grounds including the Cool Grove charnel ground and so forth, it is true that he collected everyone—the three gods, demons, and men, the eight classes of *nāga* spirits, *gnyan* spirits, and land deities, and formless beings such as ghosts and so forth—under his power and established them in Dharma. If you become a shaven-headed monastic, I don't know if you will be able to be an ascetic."

Saying this, she disappeared.

> Early the next morning when he was having breakfast, the body of the Lord became uncomfortable and he felt greater and greater pain. He thought that he had gotten a cold, but he kept it secret. After several days had passed, when the Lord got better from his cold, in the area near him a contagious disease arose and many people got sick. In particular, the Lord's middle sister named Dpal mtshe and her spouse became afflicted with illness and were nearing death. Two people from their locality came to summon the Lord and when he went there together with his attendants, his sister and her husband were on the verge of death. Hence, the Lord gave precious substances and having given the Precious Lama's [Bdud 'joms gling pa's] outer garment, he performed a body offering ritual [i.e., *gcod* practice] and a ritual for exorcising negative influences. The husband could not be saved from death and passed away. His sister was cured from illness. Having given her worldly advice, the Lord himself came home. He performed a [ritual that] remedied the *ḍākinīs'* agitation and an offering ritual and so forth and then all the sickness in the land dissipated.[24]

This passage exemplifies the associations in Se ra mkha' 'gro's writing between the *ḍākinīs*' exhortations to pursue the non-celibate religious path, the protection of physical health, and the general well-being of the social and environmental surroundings. The enraged *ḍākinī* chastises Dri med 'od zer for thinking that he could practise Secret Mantra as a celibate monk, implying that this path was less efficacious. She rules out the possibility that he could have the capacity to reveal Treasures as a celibate monk and blames his idea to do this on the influence of bad people, possibly indicating that Dri med 'od zer experienced social pressure to conform to monastic discipline. Although he marshals the example of Padmasambhava to his defence, the *ḍākinī* makes short work of this, driving the point home that Dri med 'od zer has nowhere near the power that Padmasambhava had to establish all beings in the Dharma; unlike Padmasambhava, Dri med 'od zer needs the power he will derive from consort practices. The sickness that affects Dri med 'od zer, his sister, and her unfortunate husband can only be cured by appeasing the angry *ḍākinīs*, whose intentions overpower his youthful inclinations towards celibate monasticism.

According to Dri med 'od zer's biography, being a Treasure revealer with multiple female consorts was not always an easy situation nor was it conducive to strict retreat. On several occasions Dri med 'od zer yearned to renounce the busyness of his social world by living in isolation. Yet each time he sought to become a monk,

[24] SLNT ff. 32b.6–35a.3.

visionary *ḍākinīs* prevented him by whatever drastic measures necessary. For example, towards the end of his life when he was thirty-eight years old, as a result of a social disturbance in his community, Dri med ’od zer again yearned for the peace of monastic life:

> At that time because a liar said a lot of annoying things to the Lord [Dri med ’od zer], he set his mind on one aspiration and thought that in his subsequent lifetimes he should be a monk. When he thought that he needed to be a monk, one day in his dream he saw a gathering of many women.
>
> When he wondered what this was, they said, “You don’t know us?”
>
> He answered, “I don’t know you.”
>
> They said, “We are messengers of the mantra protectors. Since you are acting as a monk, because your head and limbs belong to us, it’s okay if we cut them.”
>
> They aimed a knife at his head and were about to cut him and they displayed much other cruelty. They disturbed the channels [in his body] and not giving him a chance to be comfortable, he awoke from sleep.[25]

Through including *ḍākinī* visions such as these in Dri med ’od zer’s biography, Se ra mkha’ ’gro underlines the point that regardless of Dri med ’od zer’s wishes, *ḍākinīs*’ injunctions to live as a non-celibate religious practitioner were non-negotiable.

Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s Resistance

Although Se ra mkha’ ’gro expresses doubts, hesitations, and misgivings about following the non-celibate path of a Treasure revealer, *ḍākinīs* give her constant reminders that having male consorts is not optional for her physical health and spiritual productivity. When she was nineteen years old and living at Ban nag Monastery with the man who would become the father of her two children named Mgar ra Rgyal sras, son of the prominent nineteenth-century Treasure revealer Mgar ra gter ston Bdud ’dul dbang phyug gling pa, Se ra mkha’ ’gro recounts that she had the following interaction with the *Ḍākinī* Rdo rje gzungs ma:

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[25] SLNT f. 160a.1–160b.1.

One day a vision arose in which I arrived at the feast row of the *ḍākinīs* of the three realms. Although it seemed as if I had a vision like this, I didn't have the capacity to distinguish [what it was]. All the channels in my body were numb and it was as if my mind had suddenly become dark. I asked someone who said she was Rdo rje gzungs ma, "Although I have come to the *ḍākinīs*' feast row since I was young, I have never experienced anything like this before. My body is uncomfortable and it is as if my mind is shrouded in darkness—why is this?"

She answered, "This is because you are of a Treasure lineage and the time has come that you need to rely on a method consort. It is important to establish a noble man in ripening and liberation [instructions] and to rely on him as a consort. Because your channels are disturbed, likewise your perception is also disturbed."

Again I said, "In this area of Mdo smad mgo log, it seems that [men] are of poor ancestry with a ghostly pallor. They are ash-coloured without food or clothes and have rude, thorn-like personalities. Thinking that adhering to them would not bring the perfect realisation of liberation via skilful means, I let it go. Although a man of good lineage is like a winter flower, some have already gone under others' influence, some hesitated because of the [*Vinaya*] rules regarding what to do and not to do, and since some were rich, they seemed not to want me because I was poor. Now, whatever you say, needing a consort does not arise in me. Although there are method consorts superior to them who possess the secret esoteric instructions of the quick path on whom I could rely to bring me to actually realise the holy primordial wisdom of the self-liberation of lustful desire, I have no ability to attain them. If I meet with a man who is an unsuitable receptacle, it will be seen as a perversion of the path of mantra and will certainly be the cause for myself and others to go to the lower realms. Hence, I think I will make a pledge to live alone."

When I said this, she responded,

> "Enchanting woman who desires desirelessness—
> Associate with a method consort and
> The primordial wisdom of great bliss will manifest.
>
> Through your pure karma and aspiration prayers, you are empowered in Treasures.
> If auspicious connections do not arise, the two benefits [of self and other] will be difficult.
> If the excellent method and wisdom, prayers, and [the right] time come together,
> Abandon lazy people and those who save face.

You must be careful regarding finding a way for the
auspicious connections to arise.
Since you are not one who can live alone,
Energise all men with bliss and
Show those with desire the desireless clear light.
Find a way to bring [men] to the ground of union.
By this, the two benefits will arise, *yoginī*.

Although primordial wisdom free from desire manifests
[in you],
If you don't separate from a consort of noble lineage,
Having excellently attained the perfecting teachings,
The [energy] knots at the wheels of the five abodes will
liberate.

All appearances will arise as the wheels with letters.[26]
In this life you will attain the awareness body in union.
This is the dharma of great yogis of mantra.
There is nothing more profound than this quick path.

Seal it in the expanse of your heart.
Show this path to those with the karma.
It is certain that [they] will attain the union body of no
more learning.[27]
Keep it secret from those who are not receptacles [of this
teaching].

Don't show it to the wind[28]—
This is the chariot [leading] to wandering in the lower
realms.
Your domain is marvellous.
It is certain that whoever you connect with, it will be
meaningful.[29]

Se ra mkha' 'gro's response to the *Ḍākinī* Rdo rje gzungs ma's exhortation to rely on a male consort in order to augment her visionary capacity is telling; she doesn't simply negate the necessity of her engaging with a consort, but rather complains that she cannot find a suitable candidate, for men of good lineage are as rare as winter flowers and seem either to be attached to someone else, to be bound by celibacy vows, or to be above her social standing. Exasperated with

[26] The wheels or *cakras* of the body each have letters (*yi ge*), or Sanskrit syllables, associated with them.

[27] "No more learning" (*mi slob*) is the fifth and final of the five paths of a *bodhisattva* equal to the realisation of Buddhahood.

[28] *Rlung phyogs tsam yang ma ston cig*, i.e., don't even breathe a word of this.

[29] DDNT ff. 108b.1–10a.4.

her failure to attract the right man, she laments that, "If I meet with a man who is an unsuitable receptacle, it will be seen as a perversion of the path of mantra…". Se ra mkha' 'gro's concern is essentially a social one, rather than a strictly ethical one. It is a concern that others will judge her actions negatively if she engages in consort practices. Although she acknowledges to the visionary *ḍākinī* that there are supreme consorts whom she could rely on to bring her to "actually realise the holy primordial wisdom of the self-liberation of lustful desire", she asserts that she will choose the path that cannot be misperceived by others' watchful eyes, the "pledge to live alone". Rdo rje gzungs ma rejects her attempt to avoid the complexities of consort practices, predicting that she is not one who will live alone but rather has a responsibility to "energise all men with bliss and/ Show those who have desire the desireless clear light". While the *ḍākinīs*' words initially emphasise her duty to help men attain liberation, it becomes clear that this is not simply a *bodhisattva* act Se ra mkha' 'gro must perform for the benefit of others, but also part of her path to liberation. Hence, Se ra mkha' 'gro's writings portray consort practices as neither misogynist, focused entirely on the male partner's benefit, nor gynocentric, focused primarily on the needs of the female partner, two extreme arguments that have been put forth by Western interpreters of Buddhist consort practices.[30]

The following passage underlines this point that according to Se ra mkha' 'gro, engaging with the appropriate prophesied consort was not only an obligation to serve the needs of men, but was essential for her own physical as well as spiritual well-being. She writes the following about an interaction she had with an unnamed *ḍākinī* when she was thirty-five years old after Dri med 'od zer's death in approximately 1927:

> Then, in the tenth month of that year, I was oppressed with a terrible illness and was nearing death. At that time, on the night of the twenty-second day of the twelfth month, in my illusory perception an old wretched woman with an unappealing body and great lustful desire but with faultless sense faculties like those of a young woman came and said the following:

[30] I am thinking in particular of Shaw (1994: 69) who suggests that Tantric gender ideology is gynocentric (in the context of Indian Buddhism) and Young (2004: 168) who argues the opposite view, claiming that "Tantra is a practice in which men sexually utilize women for their own spiritual benefit". Campbell 1996 also supports this latter view.

"Ya, ya—girlfriend, what sickness do you have?
Tell me the symptoms of your sickness.
If you are sick with lustful desire that is the cause of existence
I know a good cure."

To that, I replied,

"Older sister who is neither an old woman nor a young girl,
I, neither a nun nor a wife, will explain the manner of my sickness.

From the time I was young, lamas took care of me.
They blessed my mind stream with both ripening and liberation [instructions].

I am expert in the essential points of enhancement and liberation via skilful means.
I don't need to be bound by the noose of lustful desire.

By the kindness of my consort Wish-fulfilling Jewel [Dri med 'od zer],
The three types of karmic propensities [of body, speech, and mind] are liberated from their root;
Saṃsāra and *nirvāṇa* are equal in their awareness and emptiness.

I have seen the unsurpassed meaning
Of primordial wisdom without desire and freed from desire
In which bliss and emptiness are inseparable.

I am not sick with the cause of existence.
My lust has been purified into great bliss.
Grasping onto the cause of manifest co-emergent primordial wisdom
Has ripened into the self-empty Truth Body.
I am not bothered by this sickness of lustful desire.

I am tormented by a sickness that is a combination of illnesses:
My heart is uncomfortable as if it is a large drum beating.
My lungs are uncomfortable like bellows being blown.
My gall bladder and spleen feel like putting wild horses in order.
The nerves of my two eyeballs feel as if they are about to be cut.
I can't hold up my head—it is heavier than a diamond.
Blood and bile pervade all my channels like water.
My wind is not harmonious as if quarrelling with an enemy opponent.
Long and short sighs emerge from both my mouth and nose.

This collection of elements that is my body is like inanimate
matter.

This collection of various illnesses has gathered together.
This mass of light that is the primordial wisdom of mind
Is on the verge of going out via the path of the white silk
channel.
The manner in which I am sick is like this.
If you know how to diagnose, then diagnose this."

She said:

"You, *yoginī* who are a doctor of channels and winds—
One with a beautiful face whose body liberates into light,
The origin of these various illnesses is
Obscuration by the *sapta* [demons][31] regarding method
and auspicious connections.

You abandoned the youth who sustained your body,
Brought on conditions involving [those with] perverted
vows, and so forth.
When these things occur, many negative conditions
afflict your body.

Although you see the meaning of not staying in [cyclic]
existence,
You have not purified subtle karmic propensities.
On account of the mental illusions of hopes and fears,
You didn't act in accordance with the prophecies.
You abandoned [engaging with] a *bodhisattva* who
adheres to the Dharma.

Why do you behave in the manner of the doctrine of the
lesser vehicle
With your three doors (body, speech, and mind)?
You don't see attaining the result
Of the extraordinary Dharma of the quick path of
mantra?"

Again, I said,
"Listen older sister of compatible lineage:
I have no doubt that the nature of
Practising the extraordinary Dharma of Secret Mantra
Is quick self-fruition.
I pray that in this and all my lives

[31] *Sapta* demons refer to hindrances and obstacles along the religious path according to Se ra mkha' 'gro's direct disciple Bya bral sangs rgyas rdo rje rin po che.

I meet with this quick path.
Nevertheless, these days in the Degenerate Age
Peoples' lust burns like fire.
Under the pretence of being *mantrins*, they practise non-virtue.
They assemble false Treasures, which are the ruin of themselves and others.
They throw away their seminal fluid through fornication like spit in the dust.

Practising in accordance with mantra is next to impossible.
Because of this, thinking that my female body
Would become the basis for my own and others' ruin,
I entered the path of monastic discipline.

Thinking I would be able to abandon having negative thoughts and negative rebirths,
I cast wrongdoing and negative consorts far away.
How could it harm anyone if I delight in
Entering into the path of the two truths?"[32]

Though Se ra mkha' 'gro avidly rejects the unusual old woman's insinuation that her physical ailments were the product of her celibacy, the woman accuses Se ra mkha' 'gro of acting according to a lesser standard of behaviour, that of the slower Hinayāna. Having cast away her prophesied male consort who was "the youth who sustained her body" and "the *bodhisattva* adhering to the Dharma", the old woman asserts that she has controverted the *ḍākinīs*' prophecies and spurned the quick path of Secret Mantra in favour of a safer, less-efficacious path. But Se ra mkha' 'gro responds to the old woman with a lament about the next-to-impossible difficulty of adhering properly to the path of Secret Mantra, not an outright rejection of it.

The danger Se ra mkha' 'gro articulates of engaging in lustful behaviour under the pretence of being a non-celibate *mantrin* alludes to the prevalence of this type of perverse behaviour in Se ra mkha' 'gro's milieu. Nevertheless, the old woman with keen senses responds to Se ra mkha' 'gro's fears with an exhortation to accept the risk of the quick path by giving her an elusive prophecy foretelling the places and the key figures who will aid her in accomplishing her divine purpose of revealing Treasures. She, like the other *ḍākinīs* whose divine missives pervade Se ra mkha' 'gro and Dri med 'od zer's

[32] DDNT 335a.1–37a.1.

biographical accounts, refuses to accept anything other than the non-celibate conduct befitting of a Treasure revealer.

PART III: CAN MONKS BE CONSORTS?

If the import of *ḍākinīs*' injunctions to Se ra mkha' 'gro and Dri med 'od zer to engage with consorts was indelibly clear, the dilemma Se ra mkha' 'gro repeatedly faced in determining who was and was not an appropriate prophesied consort was consistently murky. Her difficulty actualising the *ḍākinīs*' prophecies became even more complicated in the many instances when her prospective male consorts were ostensibly celibate monks. In both her autobiographical representations of her quotidian and visionary life, Se ra mkha' 'gro resisted monks who insisted that they were meant to be her consorts.

While Se ra mkha' 'gro's repeated rejections of monks' requests for her longevity-inspiring services would seem to emphasise the priority of upholding vows of celibate monasticism just as her hesitancy to fulfil *ḍākinīs*' prophecies to take on consorts seemed to do, in fact the interactions Se ra mkha' 'gro depicts portray a far more nuanced message. Se ra mkha' 'gro represents herself as both having the power to veto untoward monks' illicit propositions and as being urged by her teachers and other divine interlocutors to engage with monastics for a variety of reasons, usually relating to enhancing (both their and her own) longevity and curing illness. Though there may have been some religiously sanctioned reasons in Se ra mkha' 'gro's milieu for monks to cross the line between celibacy and sexuality, that this was controversial is evident from the careful hesitation with which Se ra mkha' 'gro describes these incidents.

Just as Se ra mkha' 'gro represents herself as firmly rejecting *ḍākinīs*' calls to engage with consorts in favour of a simpler life of celibacy, so too she did not hesitate to shame monks whose lustful desire overcame their religious aspirations. The vehemence with which she did so manifests itself in the following interaction that occurred when Se ra mkha' 'gro was twenty-five years old, unhappily married to Rgyal sras, and caring for their young daughter at the same time as she was revealing new Treasures:

> At that time, one day a man named Mgar ra rgyal mtshan came and said again and again, "Since I have received permission from Rgyal sras, we need to make a physical connection."

I thought that it was as if his mind had been inspired by demons. I said many times that from whichever of the two perspectives [religious or worldly], according to pure ethics one must accumulate the collections [of merit and wisdom] by means of the six perfections including generosity and so forth and that it was unacceptable to waste a human body endowed with the [eight] freedoms.[33] But because lust had arisen in his mind-stream, he ignored [my] meaning. He said many things that undermined cause and effect and related to mistaken behaviour.

I was extremely depressed and feeling sad about [people's] attitude in the degenerate era, I said the following:

"Lotus Born One, protector and refuge of the world,
Ḍākki Mtsho rgyal of the changeless dimension, think of me!
Look upon me, this vagabond Bde ba'i rdo rje, with
compassion!
Bestow blessings that will dispel negative conditions and
obstacles!

Listen you who are losing the Sūtric teachings on physical
discipline,
Send this thought from your mind!
Examine your body, speech, and mind:

On the outside, your attire is that of [a monk's] three robes.
On the inside, you have great lust equal to that of a bird.[34]
The thought in your mind is like that of a petty thief or a bandit.
At all times, you enjoy consuming the negative offerings [given
to monastics]

I don't desire someone like you with a negative body.
Even though I am an ordinary person with an inferior [female]
body,
If you look at my face, I am of a beautiful *ḍākinī* lineage.

Although I appear like a woman with childish intellect,
My mind sees the essence of the birthless three bodies.[35]
Although I labour as a householder,

[33] The eight freedoms include freedom from being born in the hells, in the hungry ghost realm, as an animal, a long-lived god, or a barbarian, freedom from having wrong views, from being born where there is no Buddha, and freedom from being born deaf and mute. See Patrul Rinpoche 1994: 20.

[34] This association between lust and a bird relates to a common depiction of the three poisons (hatred, ignorance, and lust) in the central part of the Wheel of Existence (*srid pa'i 'khor lo*) in which the bird (in particular the rooster) symbolises lust, the pig symbolises ignorance, and the snake symbolises hatred.

[35] The three bodies or *kāyas* are *Dharmakāya*, *Sāṃbhogakāya*, and *Nirmāṇakāya*.

> I do not need to separate from the primordial wisdom of
> equality.
>
> Having mastered the ten winds,
> Everything that appears [exists] in the dimension of great bliss
> [And] is liberated in the expanse of evenly extensive primordial
> wisdom.
>
> I don't need somebody with a body like yours.
> I won't make myself miserable in both this and the next life.
> You, imprudent one, consider this well:
> Don't exchange your body endowed with a purpose for one
> with little purpose.
>
> When the fruits of karma undeceivingly ripen,
> You will be one who has done worthless things like this.
> Now, consider this meaning."
>
> Having said this, I was freed from obstacles.[36]

Se ra mkha' 'gro thus adamantly rejects the sexual advances of a monk whom she perceives to act out of lust. Passages such as this one have a pedagogical purpose in Se ra mkha' 'gro's narrative—they serve as a message to her readership that unethical monastics must not engage in consort practices out of lust while abandoning the spiritual potential that makes their precious human births sacred. Her response to the wayward monk is strong and uncompromising: she may be a householder, but underneath her humble countenance lies the insight of a wisdom *ḍākinī*. She may be an inferior woman, but no permission from her partner Rgyal sras will trump her determination to decide for herself who is and is not a worthy consort.

And yet, although this passage seems to set an uncompromising boundary between proper ethical behaviour for monastics and non-celibate *mantrins*, it is not without ambiguity. Immediately after she recounts ridding herself of this lewd monk, she writes that in the tenth month of the same year she became very ill. When she pondered that it wouldn't be so bad if she died, a terrifying woman who had visited her in the past when she had suicidal thoughts appeared before her carrying a knife and a red noose and chastised her, saying,

> From the time you were young, I have lovingly raised you as if you were my one child. Now, on the basis of one small circumstance, you

[36] DDNT ff. 172b.6–73b.6.

> abandon your *bodhicitta* intention to benefit others. What is the meaning of your putting forth this selfish mental confusion?[37]

Se ra mkha' 'gro responds to the terrifying apparitional woman with a lament about the difficulties of being a lowly woman tied to a husband in a world in which disciples view women as inferior to men, leaving them with little prospect of actualising the *ḍākinīs*' prophecies. In response, the terrifying woman infuses Se ra mkha' 'gro with an elaborate vote of confidence through prophesying the many disciples, consorts, and Treasures that will come to her. We could read Se ra mkha' 'gro's encounter with the perverse monk and the illness that then befalls her as two proximate yet unrelated autobiographical vignettes. However, given the connection that appears repeatedly elsewhere in her autobiography between eschewing prophesied male consorts and becoming physically ill, one may also read the sudden illness that befalls her in this case as the *ḍākinīs*' reprimand for insisting on the supremacy of the monk's monastic vows over her own *ḍākinī* prophecies. Read in this way, the *ḍākinīs*' reproof and subsequent elaborate prophecy cast doubt on the propriety of Se ra mkha' 'gro's unequivocal rejection of the monk's advance.

The monk named Mgar ra Rgyal mtshan is not the only one who presses Se ra mkha' 'gro to engage in consort practices against her better judgment. Se ra mkha' 'gro describes a fascinating conversation that took place a few years later when she was twenty-seven with one of her teachers named 'Jigs bral chos kyi blo gros, a prominent nineteenth-century lama from Dpal yul dar thang dgon pa in Gcig sgril County, Mgo log.[38] 'Jigs bral chos kyi blo gros, whom Se ra mkha' 'gro always refers to as Sgo sprul rin po che, plays an important, if complicated, role in Se ra mkha' 'gro's life as the first person to recognise her as an emanation of Ye shes mtsho rgyal when she was twenty-four. He was one of the strongest supporters of her Treasure revelation activities during the time when she lived with Rgyal sras at Ban nag Monastery in Pad ma County, a time when her detractors among Rgyal sras's relatives far outweighed her supporters. Se ra mkha' 'gro hints that she and Sgo sprul rin po che were more than just teacher and disciple through comments about fearing that her visits would bring gossip (*mo kha*) upon the revered lama and her mention of Rgyal sras's jealousy of him, though she never overtly claims that she was his consort. In the following interaction, Sgo sprul rin po che

[37] DDNT 174a.3–5.

[38] See *Dar thang dgon pa'i gdan rabs* pp. 392–93 for a brief biography of 'Jigs bral chos kyi blo gros.

used his influence over Se ra mkha' 'gro to try to convince her to serve as a consort to a monk she didn't know in order to dispel obstacles to his longevity:

> At that time, Rti bir rtug rtsa sprul sku was doing a retreat in the area along with a few of his attendants. Sgo sprul said to me, "Now since you have the auspicious connections to be able to dispel the obstacles to Rti sprul's longevity, don't err in finding the best possible way to help do this. He is dressed as a monk—last year he requested full ordination vows from Rdo grub rin po che. The astrological signs were extremely disturbed. In particular, the prophecies of Rdzogs chen rin po che and many other great masters proclaim that for the sake of sustaining his longevity, he needs to secretly have a liaison with a wisdom lady of a good lineage.[39] Not only that, even though he is also a Treasure revealer, since he is the leader of a big monastery, he didn't behave as a *mantrin* but as a venerable monk engaging only in meditation practice. Because there is no one better than you to sustain his longevity, don't err in doing this."
>
> Again I said, "If he is without mistake a Treasure revealer, why does he need to be a hypocrite? The abbot of O rgyan smin gling is of course very famous for being a Treasure revealer. Hence, I don't know if it is certain that if one is not a monk, one cannot be the abbot of a monastery. I will not be his method for dispelling obstacles to his longevity. From one perspective, I have a husband. Moreover, because stealing the vows of a monastic is the cause for a great offence, I certainly will not do that."
>
> Again, Sgo sprul said, "For what reason do you have to be restricted about [offering] your body [to] him? You have mastered the esoteric precepts of the channels, seminal nuclei, and wind and you do not engage in perverse behaviour. Moreover, aside from [acting] for the benefit of another person, if you are without any negative thoughts regarding your own desire, how could it be an offence? Since I am certain that Rgyal sras has decided [that it is okay], from that perspective, I will be responsible for your not being affected by defilement. Now if we don't do something, it is certain that Rti sprul will not live beyond thirty-eight or thirty-nine years old."
>
> Again I said, "Even if Rgyal sras is agreeable, more important than him, I have an extraordinary root consort [Dri med 'od zer]. If he does not agree, I will not embark upon an important undertaking. Is it okay if I help him by just reciting a feast offering? Even if it isn't okay, I can't

[39] DDNT 222b.6 actually reads *shes rab ma rig can*, which would translate as 'intelligent wisdom lady', but I think this is a misspelling that should read *shes rab ma rigs can*, 'wisdom lady of a good lineage'.

> do anything about it—I will not make public and secret promises (*dam tshig*)."
>
> He replied, "Now go together with one of my monks to Rti sprul and it will be beneficial for both of you."
>
> Then, I went according to his order.[40]

Se ra mkha' 'gro then describes the teachings and precious gifts that Rti sprul gave her during their visit. She concludes her account of the visit with the statement that they "left the actual auspicious connection for later,"[41] an elusive phrase that could mean that she did not actually act as his consort but instead established a connection with him through other means. Though her explanation of her encounter with Rti sprul is evasive regarding the exact nature of their exchange, she writes that when she returned to Sgo sprul after the visit, he was delighted and said, "Being unaware that formerly [i.e., in a former life] he was your extraordinary consort, now your taking him on is greatly amazing!"[42] Thus, the take-home message of this passage is characteristically ambiguous: Se ra mkha' 'gro's initial powerful refusal to be the 'wisdom lady' or spiritual consort of Rti sprul ends in her going to visit him, thereby at least partially fulfilling Sgo sprul's command. Through this conversation, we see that in Se ra mkha' 'gro's milieu it was not unheard of for monks to take on consorts in order to increase their longevity or dispel unfavourable prophecies. Her reticence to "steal the vows of a monk" demonstrates the dilemma that she and others faced between privileging the moral superiority of celibacy or engaging in the efficacious means of sexual practices in order to ensure the monk's (and her own) physical health and long life. The tension between these two competing demands at times created situations where those of high ecclesiastic ranks such as Rti sprul, the abbot of a large monastery, engaged in secret consort practices while maintaining the public appearance of being celibate monks.

Although Se ra mkha' 'gro marshals the example of the famous non-celibate Treasure revealer abbot of O rgyan smin grol gling Monastery in Central Tibet to prove that not all monastery abbots had to be monks, and although she vows that she will not take part in others' or her own hypocritical behaviour, the force of Se ra mkha'

[40] DDNT ff. 222b.2–24a.2.
[41] DDNT f. 224a.4.
[42] DDNT f. 224a.5–6.

’gro’s refusal to act in this way is mitigated by her ultimate compliance with Sgo sprul rin po che’s command for her to go to Rti sprul. The narrative value of her initial adamant rejection is that it presents her as strong-willed and seriously against monks engaging in consort practices at the same time as it presents her as a virtuoso consort, prophesied by the likes of Rdzogs chen rin po che and Sgo sprul rin po che. Interestingly, she emphasises that her alliance is not primarily to her partner Rgyal sras but to her root consort Dri med ’od zer, thus emphasising the supremacy of Tantric commitments over secular bonds. Through passages like this one, we see the care with which Se ra mkha’ ’gro negotiated between the sometimes competing ideals of monastic celibacy and religiously sanctioned sexuality.

Not only in her waking reality, but also in her dream life Se ra mkha’ ’gro recounts struggling to reject monks’ unwanted sexual advances while at the same time struggling to ascertain whether or not the monks were in fact prophesied consorts necessary for her Treasure revelations. When Se ra mkha’ ’gro was thirty-six years old and was actively travelling around Mgo log and upper Khams giving teachings, she received signs that there was a Treasure she needed to reveal. However, she writes that because she didn’t have a consort, she had to let the Treasure go. Immediately after this, she writes:

> That night in a dream, two monks[43] travelling as mendicants, one big and one small, came to my place after sunset.
>
> They said, “How are you?”
>
> I answered, “I’m fine. Are you two tired?”
>
> The big monk replied, “Although we are not tired, for a long distance we didn’t find much to eat on the road. Nevertheless, we have come before you because we need to receive a teaching. Hence, we both offer our bodies to you. We need you to first give us food to fill us and later Dharma to liberate us.”
>
> I said, “If you two only stay on a remote mountain practising completely pure dharma, I will give you as much food and clothing resources as possible. Otherwise, although you give me your bodies,

[43] The term I am translating in this passage as ‘monk’ is ‘*dge sbyong*’, which usually refers to monks or nuns but also can refer to a wider category of ascetics or mendicants. I have chosen to translate it as ‘monk’ here because Se ra mkha’ ’gro implies that their offering of themselves to her as potential consorts was a deterioration of their vows.

you don't need to entrust yourselves [to me] as servants. It is alright if you assiduously practise on a remote mountain."

When I said this, the mendicant answered, "The meaning of our offering our bodies to you is not to think of a way to be your servant or to reside like a sage in rock caverns and mountain slopes! Because you are a Treasure revealer, for the purpose of being your consorts we thought we would stay [with you]."

Feeling great fear, I said, "Precious Lama think of me! Kind One, think of me!"

He said over and over again, "Although you don't desire me, in any case, you need to take this small monk under your care."

I responded by saying, "I am not even a Treasure revealer. I don't need a consort. In the past, I never had disciples with deteriorated vows like you two. Still now I won't take you on. You two, wherever you go, go away. Don't stay in this land. Even if I have to kill you both, I won't consider engaging [with you]."

Again, he said, "I know whether or not you are a Treasure revealer. Look in your [Treasure] registry—among your five main method consorts, one is this small monk. If you don't rely on him as a consort, you won't be able to decode your Treasures as well. Hence, consider this."

I became a bit confused and asked, "What land are you two from?"

He replied, "We are from Nyag khog. The small monk's name is X.[44] Hence, because the Lotus Guru's prophecies are undeceiving, [his] prayers and the [proper] time have gathered together."

Again, I said, "Although the Guru's prophecies are undeceiving, because I am of bad ancestry, I didn't find a way to act in accordance with the prophecies. From one perspective, since I am a woman (*skye lus dman pa*), even though I met with doctrine holders and method consorts, I didn't dare recognise them [as such]. From another perspective, thinking that I would offend the one with the attributes of a great *bodhisattva* whose body had received mantra, who exerted himself in unsurpassed practice, and who had relied on the path of enhancement, liberation via skilful means, and union without depending on successively traversing grounds and paths to attain an awareness body, I guard my commitment vows like the eyes in my forehead. Until I attain permission from this consort [i.e., Dri med 'od zer], even though it is in accordance with my Treasure prophecy, my mind is decided and I don't think about associating with a single consort. Even

[44] The small monk's name is written as a symbol in DDNT f. 353b.1.

> still, despite the fact that I am not a Treasure revealer, I will certainly abide by commitments without having public and secret [versions]. Hence, from whatever perspective, you two go home."
> Then, the bigger mendicant having dissolved into the smaller one, both of their bodies disappeared and their voices spoke the following:
>
> "Young ravishing beauty,
> Insatiable to look at, one with the body of supreme great bliss,
> One who speaks the truth, whose mind has abandoned deception,
> Greatly loving, powerful *ḍākkī*, you I praise.
>
> The supreme excellent path of accomplishing Buddhahood in one lifetime,
> [Is] adhering to the Vajra that accomplishes the two benefits [of self and other] at one time.
> Engage with a consort who arouses co-emergent bliss and emptiness and
> May you stay together without separating for an instant."
>
> Having said this, they disappeared into a red light in the direction of the sunset.
>
> Then, an old woman came and asked, "Did you know those two monks?"
>
> I replied, "Although I don't know them, I wonder why they spoke about various strange things?"
>
> When I asked this, she answered, "The small monk was sent to you by your method consort [named] Akā ra. The big monk is called Bswe rgyal. Hence, since you have a bit of obscuration between method and wisdom [i.e., between consorts and yourself], you need to be careful." As soon as she said this, I awoke from sleep.[45]

Once again in this dream, Se ra mkha' 'gro's adamant rejection of the monks' advances may initially seem like the only moral response to the monks' licentious behaviour, but this is not the only way to interpret their actions. The monk's claims that one of them has been prophesied by Padmasambhava as a consort necessary for Se ra mkha' 'gro to decode her Treasure revelations coupled with the *ḍākinī's* validation of the monk's unsullied credentials expose the truth behind the apparitional monks' genuine intentions. Once again, Se ra mkha' 'gro's refusal to engage with the monks has the heuristic value of

[45] DDNT ff. 352a.4–54b.4.

upholding the sacrality of monastic celibacy vows while it portrays her humility in the face of her great devotion to her consort, the great *bodhisattva* Dri med ’od zer. At the same time, the import of this dream is far from clear regarding the appropriateness of monks’ involvement with consort practices, for if anything the ephemeral monks’ parting verses and the *ḍākinī’s* warning of obscurations between male and female consorts indicates that Se ra mkha’ ’gro chose the safer, though less efficacious path by rejecting the other-worldly monks. In this instance, that which Se ra mkha’ ’gro needed for her Treasure revelations and that which upheld conventional morality were in direct contradiction.

PART IV: CONCLUSIONS

The rich dialogues in Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s writings expose a religious world in which both celibate monastic and non-celibate Tantric religious practitioners held valued and at times overlapping social and religious roles. In their youth and periodically throughout their adult life as well, both Se ra mkha’ ’gro and Dri med ’od zer seem to have at least rhetorically idealised the celibate life of a wandering ascetic as a pinnacle of religious purity. Yet Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s writings emphasise that the *ḍākinīs*’ involvement with every level of their waking and dreaming psyche turned them away from these longings to be alone and towards the more complicated path of the non-celibate Treasure revealer. Despite both of their resistance, the *ḍākinī* prophecies in Se ra mkha’ ’gro’s writings unhesitatingly asserted the necessity of both male and female Treasure revealers living as non-celibate religious specialists, regardless of the added moral and social difficulties this sometimes invited. But navigating the fault lines between celibate and non-celibate life was even more fraught with tensions in the case of a female Treasure revealer such as Se ra mkha’ ’gro, whose very identity as a non-celibate Tibetan woman and a revered Treasure revealer flouted conventional Tibetan moral distinctions between inferior female laywomen and superior, by and large male, religious hierarchs.

The path of a non-celibate Treasure revealer was complicated not only by the difficulty in ascertaining who was and was not a suitable Tantric consort, but also by the fact that others in their social milieu at times had difficulty distinguishing between religiously sanctioned consort relationships and the impure sexual relations of lay householders. Though Bdud ’joms rin po che’s Three Vow

commentary articulates a religiously sanctioned space for spiritually advanced monks to engage in consort practices, Se ra mkha' 'gro's writings are as concerned with social sanction as they are doctrinal precedent. The nun Tshul sgron's horror at Se ra mkha' 'gro's non-celibate status, Se ra mkha' 'gro's repeated mentions of the gossip that swirled around her each time she got anywhere near a celibate monk, and her defiant refusals to engage in sexual interactions with monks regardless of their realisation level indicate that some members of Se ra mkha' 'gro's communities disapproved quite strongly of any overlap in the ostensibly separate spheres of celibate and non-celibate religious life. In writing so much about *ḍākinīs*' exhortations to take on male consorts and her resistance to do so, Se ra mkha' 'gro was very aware of her readership, who were her faithful disciples and broader religious communities. Putting the onus on *ḍākinīs*' prophecies both absolved Se ra mkha' 'gro of moral culpability at the same time as it accentuated her divinely inspired authority to engage in the highest, most esoteric Tantric practices. Thus, the *ḍākinīs*' voices that permeated Se ra mkha' 'gro's autobiographical account allowed her to carve out a morally respectable place for herself in the midst of a religious tradition and a socio-historical context in which human women's voices were rarely authoritative.

Se ra mkha' 'gro never indicates anything but strong respect for celibate monastics of both sexes, and indeed some of her teachers and disciples were celibate monastics. Nevertheless, after Se ra mkha' 'gro praises the purity of celibacy, in fact the authoritative voices in her auto/biographical narratives consistently privilege the expedient means of sexuality over the moral superiority of celibacy. Just as the *ḍākinī* asks, "Why do you behave in the manner of the doctrine of the lesser vehicle/ with your three doors (of body, speech, and mind)?/ You don't see attaining the result/ of the extraordinary Dharma of the quick path of mantra?", likewise Se ra mkha' 'gro's writings advocate overcoming the urge to maintain the safety of acting in accordance with the lesser vehicle. Instead, they call upon Se ra mkha' 'gro and those who follow her to take the risk of "practising in accordance with mantra", even if this path, which involves bringing together the auspicious connections of method and wisdom, is "next to impossible".

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Abbreviations

DDNT *Dbus mo bde ba'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa nges 'byung 'dren pa'i shing rta skal ldan dad pa'i mchod sdong* by Bde ba'i rdo rje (a.k.a. Se ra mkha' 'gro)

SLNT *Skyabs rje thams cad mkhyen pa grub pa'i dbang phyug zab gter rgya mtsho'i mnga' bdag rin po che padma 'gro 'dul gsang sngags gling pa'i rnam par thar pa snying gi mun sel dad pa'i shing rta ratna'i chun 'phyan utpala'i 'phreng ba* by Mkha' 'gro bde skyong dbang mo (a.k.a. Se ra mkha' 'gro)

Sources in the Tibetan Language

Bde skyong dbang mo, Mkha' 'gro [Se ra mkha' 'gro]. *Skyabs rje thams cad mkhyen pa grub pa'i dbang phyug zab gter rgya mtsho'i mnga' bdag rin po che padma 'gro 'dul gsang sngags gling pa'i rnam par thar pa snying gi mun sel dad pa'i shing rta ratna'i chun 'phyan utpala'i 'phreng ba*. Dalhousie: Damchoe Sangpo, 1981.

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HOUSEHOLDERS AND MONKS: A STUDY OF TREASURE REVEALERS AND THEIR ROLE IN RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN CONTEMPORARY EASTERN TIBET

ANTONIO TERRONE

[Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan] became the personal attendant of Khrom dge a rig rdo rje ’chang, an emanation of Vairocana. The faith generated in his heart for seeing such a Buddha extinguished the particularly unimaginable miseries during the Cultural Revolution. For forty-three years he honoured the three kinds of satisfaction for a student to his master [respect, food, and meditation accomplishment] just like the lives of the sages of the past and received the complete instructions on the three transmissions and three vows. The master encouraged him by prophesying that the pleasant continuum of general and specific teachings of the clear Seminal Heart would benefit both the Buddhist doctrine and the living beings, and thus he named him ’Jam dbyangs lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, making him his chief student with great respect and reverence.

Additionally, O rgyan drag rtsal gling pa nominated himself doctrine holder of his profound Treasures. In particular, he received the entire teachings of the supremely secret Seminal Heart from the excellent master, the wish-fulfilling gem ’Jigs med phun tshogs, and he became a beautiful ornament of the teachings of the earlier translations. In accordance with a prophecy of the Treasure revealer Dri med [’od gsal gling pa?], which said “In the upper part of Khrom the emanation of Dpal [gyi] seng [ge] will appear/ A small monastery will be established on a mountain unseen before/ and the teachings of Sūtra and Tantra will flourish everywhere”, in the fire-hare year of 1987 the O rgyan bsam gtan gling temple was erected on [Mount] Ya rtse dpal ri gnyis pa and the teachings of the Sūtra and Tantra were established as fundamental.

The supremely secret, unsurpassable explanation on the ripening of the Great Perfection showered both Chinese and Tibetans in accordance with their intellect. Having achieved the virtues of experience and realisation similar to the scriptures, they still preserve them nowadays. Many miracles took place, such as the manifestation of bodily remains, tiny spherical relics, and images of the peaceful and wrathful deities associated with afterlife.

> Also, just as reported in the Treasure prophecies of Padma bdud 'dul: "Raise the skull of conch shell to Amitābha, and pray for the silk tiara of the mirror of great benefit", especially in such a great sacred place, he opened many Treasure gates. While numerous unprecedented items representing the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha spontaneously manifested, he excavated various Treasure articles. Furthermore, non-human Treasure lords directly offered him both profound and public Treasures, while he attained other profound Treasures independently. Having achieved knowledge of the three times, he was thus able to make predictions. On his body divine images would appear to every devotee and bodily remains and tiny spherical relics would materialise from his body as signs of Buddhahood.[1]

The passage above is taken from *The Melodious Drum of the Gods: A Short Biography of the Incomparable Kind Master Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan*.[2] It is a presentation of a Tibetan Buddhist master from eastern Tibet, the well-known Treasure revealer Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, who leads a Buddhist community of both Tibetan and Chinese devotees at his religious encampment (*chos sgar*) called Ya rtse bsam gtan gling.[3] More popularly known as Ya chen sgar, his religious community is not far from the eastern Tibetan town of Dkar mdzes in present day Sichuan Province of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Autobiographical and self-promoting pamphlets of Treasure revealers such as the one containing the description above have been quite common in Tibet over the last decade and represent one of the new forms of literature distributed among devotees. In addition to providing an essential biographical outline of the Treasure revealer including his deeds and major spiritual achievements, they often

[1] Phur pa bkra shis and 'Brug rgyal (eds). n.d. *Rje bka' drin mtshungs med grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan mdzad bsdus lha rnga'i sgra dbyangs*, Dpal yul, Sichuan (PRC): Ya chen Monastery, 2–3.

[2] Phur pa bkra shis and 'Brug rgyal n.d., henceforth *The Melodious Drum of the Gods*.

[3] In this paper 'Tibet' refers in general to cultural Tibet including those regions and areas under the jurisdiction of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and corresponds to the definition of Tibet as provided by the Tibet Information Network (TIN): "Tibet was traditionally comprised of three main areas: A mdo (north-eastern Tibet), Khams (eastern Tibet), and U-Tsang (central and western Tibet). The Tibet Autonomous Region (Ch. Xizang Zizhiqu) was set up by the Chinese government in 1965 and covers the area of Tibet west of the Yangtse river, including the part of Khams, although it is often referred to as 'Central Tibet' in English. The rest of A mdo and Khams have been incorporated into Chinese provinces, and where Tibetan communities were said to have 'compact inhabitancy' in these provinces they were designated Tibetan Autonomous prefectures and counties. As result, most of Qinghai, and parts of Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces are acknowledged by the Chinese authorities to be 'Tibetan'", TIN 2002: 11.

contain photos of the protagonist, supplications, and aspiration prayers for his well-being. Frequently, these writings emphasise the miraculous elements of the Treasure revealer's life and activities and are often supported with photos of Treasures excavated, places visited, and influential masters encountered. In this way these pamphlets can be considered as a sort of résumé of the Buddhist master meant to inspire devotees to meet him, venerate him, and pay visits to his residence.

In the second half of the last century, Tibet's social, cultural, and religious life experienced several adjustments coordinated by the policies of the People's Republic of China (PRC). As the political landscape continues to shift from less repressive to more economically-motivated reforms, Tibetans continually find solutions to negotiate the cultural legacy and religious traditions of their land with the new political regime. One of the most dramatic repercussions of decades of Chinese-led administration is the Buddhist monastic institution's loss of its dominance as a political and economic force in Tibet. Monasteries were stripped of their large estates and demographic power together with their monopoly on education, leaving them with demolished buildings, devastated libraries, and much reduced human resources. Much more damage has been done to the delicate balance between scholastic knowledge and contemplation-based experience that constitute the basis of Tibetan Buddhist tradition. While the launch of the 1978 economic reforms has enacted a renaissance of the monastic structure, re-establishing the foundation of monasticism, less fortunate was the reconstitution of the manpower capable of returning traditional instruction and knowledge of the yogic, contemplative, and meditative practices to its original grandeur. In the wake of the exodus of qualified Tibetan Buddhist masters into exile, in recent decades Treasure revelation—the Tibetan religious tradition of the concealment and rediscovery of sacred objects and teachings as Treasures (*gter ma*) by Treasure revealers (*gter ston*)—has proven to be among the most successful strategies in the re-appropriation of religious authority in Tibet.[4]

This paper investigates the life and teachings of two contemporary Treasure revealers, one monastic and one non-celibate, who both have important roles in the contemporary Treasure revelation movements in eastern Tibet: the fully-ordained monk Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal

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[4] For a discussion on the *gter ma* tradition in Tibet see Thondup 1986 and Gyatso 1998.

mtshan and the non-celibate Tantric adept Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje. While expanding on the phenomenon of Treasure revealers in present-day Tibetan areas of Sichuan and Qinghai, this paper argues that this phenomenon has become a conspicuous and growing religious movement thanks to four primary reasons: charismatic leadership, spiritual authority fuelled by what I call the ‘ecology of revelation’, the renovation of traditional religious education and meditation instruction, and a flexible accommodation of social concerns and spiritual interests.

In analysing the role of Treasure revelation in contemporary Tibet, my sense is that whereas the religious, political, economic, and educational power of the great monastic institutions has been weakened by being subjugated by decades of often arbitrary political control and religious policies, other ancillary places of practice dedicated to meditative development and contemplation experience such as the mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) and religious encampments (*chos sgar*) often led by Treasure revealers have gained momentum. The excavation of *gter ma* items and the tradition of the visionary revelation of scriptural texts are successfully and increasingly being employed in varying degrees by some leading Tibetan Rnying ma Buddhist teachers in Tibet today. As this essay illustrates, a significant link seems to exist between Treasure revelation and the charismatic leadership that characterises some of the most outstanding Buddhist communities at the centre of religious revival in Tibet. When we analyse the popularity gained by forms of religious gathering such as the religious encampments and mountain hermitages in eastern areas of Tibet, we realise how eclectic education, traditional religious instruction, and the presence of a charismatic leader seem to create the ideal ground for religious development in present-day eastern Tibet.

The present contribution thus provides an inquiry into how the revelation of Treasure (*gter ma*) articles and teachings is employed in present-day Tibet to confirm forms of spiritual authority and leadership. My observations are informed by various fieldwork trips primarily carried out in Skye rgu mdo and Nang chen areas of today’s Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Yushu TAP) in Qinghai between 1998 and 2001.[5]

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[5] This paper is largely based on my current doctoral dissertation at Leiden University in the Netherlands. The dissertation titled *Bya rog prog zhu: The Raven Crest. The Life and Works of Gter chen Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje, Treasure Discoverer of Contemporary Tibet*, presents a general study of the Treasure tradition in contemporary Tibet and focuses on the life and works of a present-day Treasure

When analysing the Tibetan religious community's response to the secularising forces and modernization policies of the PRC, some questions immediately emerge. Why and how have Treasure revealers become so present in the religious landscape of present-day Tibet? What can they offer their communities of both monastics and lay devotees that cannot be found elsewhere?

In pre-1959 Tibet, religious phenomena such as visionary revelation and the unearthing of *gter ma* artefacts mostly belonged to a non-monastic class of Tantric adepts generally called *sngags pa*. With a few exceptions, fully-ordained monastics have rarely been listed among the most successful Treasure revealers.[6] However, these are as much cultural statements as they are religious ones, as these claims reveal Treasure revealer's fluid adaptability to context-dependent circumstances brought about by socio-historical changes and pressing political circumstances. Since the tenth century, in Tibet visions and *gter ma* discoveries were often used as devices to support claims of spiritual authority, predominantly among the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. In the present-day context, I interpret this re-affirmation of spiritual authority by contemporary Treasure revealers as a way to link their mandate to an idealised mytho-historical era, namely the eighth century, remembered as a time when Tibet was ruled by pious Buddhist Kings, Buddhism flourished, and the success of its dissemination was largely attributed to the Indian mystic Padmasambhava. I suggest that the renewed religious leadership among Treasure revealers has strengthened the religious community in Tibet and reinforced a sense of Tibetan identity.

The first part of this paper investigates the religious context of present-day eastern Tibetan regions of Khams and Mgo log. Focusing on post-Mao and post-Deng religious and political developments, this section offers a background frame in which to contextualise the activities of Treasure revealers and their role in their religious communities. Such a survey also expands on the precarious balance between the current economic development and religious activities in eastern Tibet offering a view of the dramatic transformation of the role of monasteries away from being religious, educational, and economic centres.

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revealer Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Herein I will limit my observations to the general state of religious practices in contemporary Tibet and I will leave out most of the scriptural material I have used in my research. For further and more incisive details on the topic please refer to my dissertation.

[6] Thondup 1986: 82.

The second part of this study offers an overview of the phenomenon of the large Buddhist encampments (*chos sgar chen mo*) and mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) led primarily by Treasure revealers and that are becoming popular places of scholastic study and contemplative practice among monastics and lay devotees alike. Foregrounded by the charismatic leadership of Treasure revealers, both monastic and non-monastic, these religious centres constitute one of the most vibrant elements of the revivification of religious practice in present-day eastern Tibet. Specifically, we will analyse the life and career of the fully-ordained monk and Treasure revealer Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, founder and current head of Ya chen sgar in Khrom thar (Dpal yul County, Dkar mdzes TAP) and the life and visionary activities of Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje, a non-celibate Tantric adept and Treasure revealer who currently lives in Shar mda’ (Nang chen) in Qinghai. These two Buddhist leaders offer rich material for a study of the Treasure tradition in contemporary Tibet that highlights Treasure revealers’ variety of lifestyles, both monastic and non-monastic, and their employment of Treasure articles and visionary revelations as a primary strategy supporting the construction of religious authority in areas of Khams and A mdo.

REFORMS IN THE DENG ERA AND THEIR REPERCUSSIONS ON TIBETAN RELIGION TODAY

Monasteries have been at the heart of Tibetan religious life for centuries; the phenomenon of monasticism among Tibetans in traditional Tibet was such that some scholars have defined it as ‘mass monasticism’ to represent the magnitude of the monastic population.[7] For their economic support, traditionally, monasteries capitalised on human resources and religious services. Families supported monasteries by submitting corvée tax obligations including manual labour, sending one or more children to the monastery, paying rent, and farming in the monastery land. Another central source of income for monasteries was rituals. Monks and reincarnate lamas would perform various types of rituals, ceremonies, family services, and often would teach Buddhist doctrine to lay people and other followers in exchange for donations. Additionally, another vital source of yearly income for monasteries was land and property possession that

[7] Goldtsein 1998: 15–16. In this essay I am particularly concerned with Buddhist monasteries and not with the monastic tradition of Bon, also equally important.

included agricultural estates and pastoral areas, many of which were leased to others.[8] All these sources of income were meant to sustain monastic activities, to fund the monks, and to support building maintenance.

With the introduction of the Chinese government's laws and regulations since 1953, especially the land and property reforms, the situation of Buddhist monasteries in Tibet suddenly changed.[9] Lands and properties owned by the monasteries were expropriated by the state, monastic residents were significantly reduced, and corvée labour was abolished. This left practically all monasteries in Tibet with an enormous financial and human shortfall. The [Great Proletarian] Cultural Revolution (Ch. *wuchang jieji wenhua dagemin*, 1966–1976) launched by Mao Zedong (1893–1976) caused even more damage to the already depleted Tibetan population and had a catastrophic effect on all aspects of Tibetan society.[10] Revolutionary fervour and violence resulted in the destruction of thousands of religious sites and buildings as well as bringing on physical and psychological harassment to thousands of 'politically labelled' individuals including the aristocratic and the monastic elite.

With Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997)'s rise to power in 1977, China enjoyed a series of economic reforms and modernisations that helped her re-emerge as a new world economic power. Deng and his allies' 'reform and opening' (Ch. *gaige kaifang*) policies aimed at an economic overture. With their launch in 1978, China entered a period of significant transformation from a socialist economy to a free market economy.[11] Such a dramatic change also brought about new attitudes to China's political past in order to embrace a more profitable and practical approach for its future. By openly criticising Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, for instance, and by shaping his country to his theory of 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics', Deng opened

[8] Goldstein 1998: 19.
[9] Goldstein 2007: 456–63; Shakya 1999: 116–17.
[10] Shakya 1999: 314–47.
[11] The *gaige kaifang*, or 'reform and opening,' affected many areas of the Chinese system under Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997). This liberalisation, which was in fact a modernisation movement, was mainly applied to economic and social fields. Its forces turned into a tidal wave by the late 1980s, which not only brought China into the modern world, but moderately loosened the Party's grip on personal, social, and cultural life (Fairbank and Goldman 1998: 406–19; Hunter and Chan 1996: 21–65). Deng Xiaoping's strategy was summed up in the Four Modernisations (Ch. *si ge xiandaihua*): agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence. First introduced by Zhou Enlai in 1975, these were further developed and officially launched by Deng in 1978 (Dreyer 2006: 110–49; Lieberthal 2004: 134–36).

China to the world. With a new free-market economy, he set the stage not only for the introduction of China to the world economic scene but also for more flexibility towards social issues and an increased religious tolerance.[12]

In tandem with the reforms and to stimulate local economies, Deng Xiaoping's political technocrats embraced a more flexible attitude towards problematic and often controversial issues including local cultural traditions, ethnic minorities, and religious beliefs. Although seen by some scholars as a side effect rather than a conscious strategic move, Deng Xiaoping's openness to modernisation encouraged socio-cultural changes throughout China, and to varying degrees among ethnic minority nationalities (Ch. *shaoshu minzu*).[13] The Chinese government's acknowledgement of the excesses that occurred during the years ruled by Mao Zedong allowed Deng's political elite to take on a milder attitude towards the expression of religious belief and practice and towards local cultural habits and customs both in mainland China and among ethnic minority areas. The Chinese government's economic reforms and political attitude gave Tibetans the opportunity to revive some aspects of their cultural and religious life that had been forcibly suppressed during the previous decades. Hu Yaobang's visit to Tibet in 1980 provided the opportunity for a certain degree of autonomy in religious life, accompanied by a moderate cultural liberalisation.[14] Such an opening set the ground for a degree of recovery and reparation of the cultural and material destruction experienced during the CCP's previous periods of hard-line policies. This revival of religious expression, as well as of local dialects, folk practices, and the arts proliferated in Tibet as well as among many other ethnic groups.[15]

Since the application of the economic reforms, the official Chinese position towards religious belief and practice has been one of toleration and control, recognising five major religious systems in the

[12] Marti 2002.

[13] Dreyer 2006: 293.

[14] The early stages of the new attitude towards Tibetans was predominantly featured by the Party's Secretary General Hu Yaobang's (1915–1989) attempts to apply a more ethnically sensitive strategy in Tibet. Indeed Hu Yaobang's liberal reform program was at first implemented in both its ethnic and economic dimensions. These concessions continued unchanged until the late 1980s even after the resignation of Hu Yaobang in 1987 (Goldstein 1997: 61–66).

[15] Commenting on the revival of religion in Tibet, Toni Huber has incisively remarked that: "it allowed Tibetans far more scope to explore—however tentative at times—new or reinvented 'old' initiatives and practices in the way they conducted their lives, and also, most importantly, how they thought about and expressed their identities in both public and private spheres". (Huber 2002: xix).

country (Islam, Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Protestantism) and applying strict regulations on the management of religious communities, activities, and institutions.[16] Most local and popular religious practices, such as circumambulations, pilgrimages, festivals, and visits to local shrines and monasteries have undergone a distinct revival since the late 1970s. Monasteries have been put back into operation and many monastic compounds were allowed to restore and rebuild damaged religious buildings sponsored both privately and in some cases by the government. However, under the Chinese government's politically motivated interests—reducing religious authority, modernising the country, maintaining the ethnic unity of the country, and upholding the centrality of the Communist Party—monasteries also underwent a restructuring of the administrative system, a reform of the religious education system, and the implementation of political indoctrination among monastics.

As a consequence of the internationalisation of the Tibetan issue since the generation of the Tibetan Diaspora in the 1960s and the international popularity of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, especially since the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, Beijing has tightened its grip on domestic manifestations of public discontent, Tibetan nationalism, and cultural identity. Motivated by the occasional outburst of political and social discontent often coordinated by monastics in the last decades especially, the central government and local authorities have launched a long-term campaign of 'patriotic education' (Ch. *aiguo jiaoyu*) targeting sympathisers of the Dalai Lama and supporters of Tibetan independence.[17] Since the mid-1980s, the central government has been active in promoting political and patriotic education and anti-splittism (Ch. *fan xielie*) campaigns in Tibet primarily in monasteries to gain control over national unity and ethnic integration. Therefore, despite a more tolerant attitude towards regulated religious practices, the

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[16] In 2004 a new set of regulations and requirements for religious institutions was promulgated in the PRC in Chinese and other nationalities' languages. Officially released on November 2004, the "Regulations of Religious Affairs" (Ch. *Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli*; Tib. *Chos lugs las don skor gyi srol yig*, henceforth *Regulations*) re-emphasises the rules concerning the administration of religious bodies and institutions, religious clergy, and religious activities in the PRC. For an English translation see "Newly Promulgated Religious Affairs Provisions" in *Chinese Law and Religion Monitor Journal*, 2005, 2 (April-June), pp. 52–66 and online at http://www.monitorchina.org/images/journals/journal2_e.pdf.

[17] Smith 2008: 170–82.

complete revival of monasticism in Tibet has been quite problematic.[18]

However, the political situation faced by Buddhist monasteries in the last twenty years is not the only source of frustration in their attempts to regain control and power of their activities. Recently Ven. Jing's essay has illustrated the impact of the new market economy on Buddhist monastic activities in the PRC.[19] He has demonstrated how the rapid economic development in China has forced monasteries to compete in both public and private sectors in order to become financially self-sufficient and economically independent thus often functioning as "money-making machines."[20] Having lost the traditional sources of income largely based on revenues from land and property leasing, classic forms of public services such as the performance of rituals, family rites, ceremonies, and religious teachings, monasteries have become unable to sustain themselves economically. Tourism, participation in other economic and industrial services, and involvement in social welfare projects have therefore become new and necessary sources of income for many monasteries in China.[21]

Tibetan Buddhist monasteries have faced a similar challenge in the past few decades and many religious leaders have embraced a rather flexible attitude in order to increase the income of their monasteries. As a consequence of the large-scale economic reforms enacted in the late 1970s, modernisation, the free market, and the new economic openness are all posing new challenges to monasteries in eastern Tibet. These factors have caused the emergence of diverse monastic economies based on strategies meant to promote economic self-sufficiency and develop rapid financial income. For instance, several large monasteries in eastern Tibet have initiated supplementary economic activities such as printing houses, book shops, and computer centres, but also souvenir shops, restaurants, and even hotels to support their monastic activities. Just like in many other areas of China, Tibetan monasteries too have been enjoying greater benefits from the new economic strategies. Additionally, national and international tourism and a current influx of Chinese devotees interested in Tibetan Buddhism have significantly improved monastic economies. Both local authorities and the central government have

[18] Shakya 1999: 419.
[19] Jing 2006. See also Birnbaum 2003.
[20] Jing 2006: 86–89.
[21] Jing 2006: 89.

promoted interest in Tibetan tourism, culture, and Tibetan Buddhism in order to increase the economic development of the Western regions. In the last decade, these strategies have generated a growing wave of Chinese devotees travelling to Tibetan areas to learn and study Buddhism with Tibetan masters and to visit Tibetan monasteries and religious centres.[22]

Despite the implementation of a certain degree of religious freedom and the possibility for monasteries to engage in financial activities to benefit their economic development, religious education and practice have been heavily undermined in Tibet by the continual control applied by local authorities and by the application of strict measures that regulate the performance of religious activities. Thus while capitalising on the material reconstruction of religious sites that benefits both Tibetan culture and economic development, monasteries have not necessarily made gains in the heart of the matter, i.e., the ability to perform traditional religious activities. In the past decades many monasteries have been re-opened and many of their buildings repaired and renovated largely thanks to national and overseas lay devotees' financial support. Despite the dramatic destruction and violation of many religious sites prior to and during the years of the Cultural Revolution, more and more Tibetan Buddhist leaders in Tibet and abroad have been allowed, not without local authorities' intercession, to invest in the restoration of monasteries and the construction of temples.[23] Motivated by the central government's pressure to secure tight national unity and solid ethnic integration in the country, forms of 'political education' (Ch. *zhengzhi jiaoyu*), dissemination of political and patriotic material, and political examinations have been introduced in many monasteries in eastern Tibet. As a consequence, religious study has been mixed with more mundane elements of political culture. Following the fourteenth Dalai Lama Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho's departure in 1959, a large number of leading religious personalities have fled into exile as well as nearly two thousand monks and nuns each year hoping to maintain their distinctive culture and identity and to study and operate in a more

[22] Birnbaum 2003: 139–43.

[23] Next to overseas lay devotees' extraordinary role in the rebuilding of a large number of religious material structures in Tibetan areas, Chinese devotees have also had a fundamental role not only in the reconstruction of Tibetan Buddhist buildings, but also in the rising popularity of present-day Buddhist practices (Birnbaum 2003: 141–42 and Terrone 2008.

religious-friendly environment.[24] The lack of highly educated religious personalities and authorities in Tibet has also reflected detrimentally on the continuation of the traditional tripartite system of empowerment (*dbang*), reading authorisation (*lung*), and pith instruction (*khrid*) typical of traditional Tibetan Buddhist Tantric education. Furthermore, the actual state of religious practices is continually undermined by the introduction of state sponsored campaigns of political propaganda in Tibet aiming to weaken the authority and the prestige of religious monastic centres and influential religious leaders.

The reconstitution of the contemplative and meditative texture of Tibetan Buddhist education has been spearheaded by an exiguous number of mystics and contemplatives who managed to live through the tortuous years of the Cultural Revolution and who opted to stay in their land instead of living in exile. Scarred by the past decades of hardships, these experienced masters and teachers initially opted for a secluded lifestyle surrounded by a small circle of personal students. More recently in the past two decades, the desire to receive esoteric education and traditional forms of Tantric instruction has motivated thousands of devotees to congregate around these charismatic figures and to create new forms of religious gatherings in the form of mountain hermitages and religious encampments. Today these religious communities have acquired an increasingly important role as their numbers of monastics, both monks and nuns, have grown exponentially. An interesting phenomenon in the past two decades associated with such a revival is the growing role played by visionaries and Treasure revealers, who in most cases are the spiritual leaders of these non-monastic religious communities.

[24] Groups of both religious and lay Tibetans continually leave Tibet to search freedom and education abroad. Recently the spectacular events related to the escape of the seventeenth Karma pa U rgyan ’phrin las from his seat in Mtshur phu monastery in central Tibet and the escape by A rgya blo bzang thub bstan ’gyur med rgya mtsho, abbot of the Sku ’bum monastery near Xining in Qinghai, may also be taken into consideration as emblematic of the political atmosphere currently present in Tibetan regions. In this regard see TIN 1998, 2000a, 2000b.

THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS ENCAMPMENTS AND MOUNTAIN HERMITAGES LED BY TREASURE REVEALERS IN EASTERN TIBET: TWO CASE STUDIES

In the last two decades approximately a dozen non-monastic, loosely-formed religious congregations and Buddhist encampments have grown and are thriving to an extent reminiscent of the large monastic academies in pre-1959 Tibet. Some of the most popular and largest religious encampments currently active in eastern Tibet today are led by Treasure revealers. Predominantly representing the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism, these include Bla rung sgar, founded by the late Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1834–2004) in Gser rta; Ya chen sgar (Ya rtse bsam gtan gling), led by Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan in Khrom mtha' in Dpal yul County; Snyan lung sgar (or Snyan lung dgon), founded by Nam sprul 'jigs med phun tshogs and his late consort Tāre lha mo (1938–2002), and Lung sngon sgar (Thub bstan chos 'khor gling) in Dga' bde County in Mgo log, founded by the non-celibate Tantric teacher Padma gtum po, who is also and more popularly known by the name of O rgyan sku gsum gling pa.[25] Often counting on the volatile support of local authorities and government cadres, most of these semi-monastic Buddhist centres are registered as mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) and religious encampments (*chos sgar*), thereby choosing an unofficial status rather than the qualification of a formal monastery and its associated restrictions. Modelled on the traditional structure of mountain hermitages, which were isolated retreat centres hosting monastics devoted to the practice of meditation and contemplation who were typically linked to other home monastic institutions, today's religious encampments have grown in popularity, attracting larger numbers of both monastics and lay devotees and considerably altering the local economy of many areas.

Religious encampments (*chos sgar*) are not a novelty to Tibetans; they already existed in pre-1959 Tibet. However, the nature of such religious entities has always been quite nebulous. The notion of a large compound composed of a mixed population of both monastics

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[25] Most of these encampments are located in the Mgo log and Khams areas of today's Sichuan. One reason they are located in Mgo log is that this is one of the major Rnying ma regions. Also, the popularity of *sgars* in such geographically remote areas is related to the fact that in these areas Chinese pressure is more relaxed than in the more central regions of Tibet such as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), where religious life undergoes even more serious repression.

and lay devotees living in the same space had already developed in the fourteenth century around the fourth Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340–1383) and was further extended by some of his successors. Such a Buddhist community was known as *karma pa'i chos tshogs sgar chen 'dzam gling rgyan* (The Karma pa's Great Religious Gathering Encampment that Adorns the World) or simply *chos tshogs sgar chen* (The Great Religious Gathering Encampment). It was especially with the sixth Karma pa Mthong ba don ldan (1416–1453) and the seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506) that these reached a definitive structure with regulations for their residents and schedules for religious practice.[26]

The rising phenomenon of *chos sgar* in combination with the increasing popularity of their charismatic Buddhist leaders represents Tibetans' attempts to sustain their religious identity by regaining control over religious organisation and practice. My sense is that the re-emergence of semi-monastic Buddhist encampments in eastern Tibet can be attributed to two major factors: 1) the need to reassert traditional forms of religious authority following the weakening of the economic power, political influence, and social force of monasteries as the leading centres of traditional religious education and instruction; and 2) the increasing success and popularity of charismatic religious leaders claiming visionary experiences and Treasure revelation skills that have inspired a growing lay meditation movement not only among Tibetans, but also among Chinese devotees. Additionally, in order to promote a higher standard of education, most religious encampments combine rigorous curricula of scholastic studies with long-term sessions of contemplation and meditation practices. Therefore, the attractiveness of the *chos sgar* for many monastics is the quality of the curriculum and instruction they offer, something which has been practically unavailable in formal monasteries in the last two decades.[27]

Although the *chos sgar* were originally travelling encampments much in the style of military camps (*dmag sgar*), nowadays most of them tend to represent themselves as administratively and economically independent and stationary communities with their own

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[26] See Thub bstan phun tshogs 1993 and Terrone ForthcomingB.

[27] It is worth noting here that the fame of many *chos sgar* leaders has reached mainland China and that among the *sgar* practitioners are to be found not only Tibetans but also Han Chinese and other Asians such Malaysians, Taiwanese, Singaporeans, and Mongolians. In some cases, the popularity of the religious figures leading *sgars* has increased after they travelled outside Tibet and often in mainland China and other Asian countries to give teachings.

identity, education curriculum, and meditative trends. Like monasteries, *sgar* have also been forced to expand their activities in order to increase their income and to sustain their religious activities. Where most religious encampments diverge from the monasteries is their decentralised administration and the fact that their inhabitants need to provide their own economic resources. Additionally, the *chos sgar*s identify themselves with the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. Although some offer a rather ecumenical curriculum, the doctrines and contemplative practices they privilege represent the Rnying ma system and incorporate the study and practice of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) mostly in its Seminal Heart version (*snying thig*).

However, the religious encampments are not the only centres of meditative instruction and contemplation practice in Tibet today. Inspired by the relatively liberal attitude of the economic reforms, many traditional mountain hermitages—often associated with monastic institutions—are currently active in areas of eastern Tibet. Smaller in size and in population, these centres are less well-known and usually, but not always, operate in tandem with larger monastic institutions. Their spiritual leaders are often Rnying ma non-celibate Tantric personalities who have chosen a more secluded lifestyle and live at their hermitages and mountain retreat centres with a small entourage of close disciples and devotees. As in the case of the leaders of the large *chos sgar* that we mentioned above, the majority of these Buddhist teachers claim to be Treasure revealers who have excavated *gter ma* items and revealed Treasure cycles. Among the most active Treasure revealers who head mountain retreats are Bkra shis rgyal mtshan who lives in his household in Shar mda' in Nang chen and Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje, both affiliated with the Rdza mer chen Hermitage of the Dpal me Monastery in Shar mda', Nang chen; Rig 'dzin nyi ma, who leads his Tsung shar ri khrod in Snyan lung; Lha rgyal Rin po che, Sangs shis rin po che, and Lha mtsho rin po che from Padma county; and A 'dzoms rgyal sras padma dbang rgyal (also known as A 'dzoms pad blo rin po che, b. 1971) who currently leads his *sgar* known as Re khe dgon chen chos sgar chen mo o rgyan bsam gtan gling in Go 'jo, Chab mdo Prefecture.[28]

[28] We should keep in mind that such forms of religious community do not necessarily constitute any well-defined and absolutely independent identity. According to my experience the borders distinguishing *chos sgar* and *ri khrod* often overlap and blur. In today's Tibet religious communities formally established as *ri*

According to my survey there are approximately between fifteen and twenty Buddhist figures claiming or believed to be Treasure revealers in eastern Tibet today in various areas of Sichuan and Qinghai. However, the actual number could be even higher since many Treasure revealers are known only locally and a number are likely to be householders and have rather small circles of disciples.

Who are these Treasure revealers behind the rapid growth of *chos sgar* and *ri khrod*? Tibetan Buddhist, as well as Bon, history is rich with Treasure revealers and there is surely nothing new to the fact that there might be various *gter stons* operating in the same area and even in the same village. The vocational choices of today's Treasure revealers vary from monastic predilections to non-celibate lifestyles, which determines in some cases the nature and orientation of the practices performed within the religious circles led by these religious leaders. Like many other non-celibate religious figures such as *yogis*, hermits, and Tantric professionals, Treasure revealers are predominantly devoted to a life dedicated to personal meditative practice and ritual activities. However, as in the case of monastics who perform rituals for the lay community for the benefit of the monastery, Treasure revealers too respond to the necessity to support themselves by performing rituals, ceremonies, and other religious services for their communities.

Although among Treasure revealers of the past there have been a few who are fully-ordained monks such as Padma dbang gi rgyal po (1487–1542), Rig 'dzin 'ja' tshon snying po (1585–1656),[29] Lha btsun nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597–1650), and Kun bzang 'gro 'dul (1897–1946), taxonomically speaking Treasure revealers have mostly been non-celibate Tantric specialists. The same seems to be true for the present-day situation. Among today's Treasure revealers in Tibet there are a few who are fully-ordained monks (*rab byung*, *grwa pa*) like the late Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1934–2004), Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, and A 'dzoms rgyal sras pad ma dbang rgyal. However, there are several other Treasure revealers who live as non-celibate householder Tantric specialists (*khyim pa sngags pa*). Non-celibate Tantric specialists (*sngags pa*) are traditionally involved in the local micro-economy by providing ritual services to the community and thus supporting themselves and often their families.[30]

khrod are also often called *chos sgar* or *dgon pa* and *vice versa*, suggesting that such epithets can be rather flexible.

[29] Thondup 1986: 82.

[30] Samuel 1993: 288–89.

One difference my sources have noted between celibate and non-celibate Treasure revealers is that to some extent material treasures (*sa gter*) seem to be retrieved in larger number by those *gter ston* who are ordained and who live as celibate monks as in the case of Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, and A ’dzoms rgyal sras padma dbang rgyal.[31] Mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*) and long cycles of Treasure teachings (*gter skor*), instead, seem to be mainly revealed by non-ordained and non-monastic teachers such as Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje, Bkra shis rgyal mtshan, Nam sprul ’jigs med phun tshogs, and O rgyan sku gsum gling pa.[32] This last point is of significant importance since one issue currently debated in some Tibetan religious circles revolves around the necessity or merits for a *gter ston* to have the support of a consort for his revelatory activities.[33]

Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan and Ya chen sgar

Among the most famous Buddhist teachers of the past twenty years, Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs (1934–2004) and Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan (b. 1927) are known for the magnitude of their followings. Both monastics and lay devotees have increasingly gathered around them in the last decade and have exponentially expanded the size of their religious encampments (*chos sgar*). Additionally, they are renowned for their spectacular Treasure revelations, which often feature miracles and Treasure revelations at public events.[34] As Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs’s religious

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[31] ’Gyur med tshe ring 2006. Such information has emerged during several conversations with both Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje and Bkra shis rgyal mtshan in August 2004 at Rdza mer chen Hermitage in Shar mda’, Nang chen (Yushu TAP).

[32] This is quite in line with tradition of revelation as mind Treasures usually are the prerogative of those *gter stons* with a consort who supports them in their practices, an element of practice rarely accepted within monastic environments. As Tulku Thondup observes, a consort for the treasure discoverer has two purposes. The first is the attainment of the union of great bliss (*bde chen*) and emptiness (*stong nyid*). The second is the crucial role of the consort in helping the *gter ston*’s awakening of the realisation as well as the actual discovery of the *gter ma*. Thondup 1986: 82–84.

[33] Germano 1998 has mentioned Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs’ personal thoughts concerning the necessity to have a consort to enhance his revelations and his critical views about the general attitude of contemporary Tantric teachers. I have discussed this issue elsewhere in Terrone ForthcomingA and ForthcomingB. See also Jacoby 2007 and Jacoby’s article in this volume, which explore the significance of consorts in relation to Treasure revealers and the tensions between the celibate and non-celibate conduct of Treasure revealers as seen through the auto/biographical writings of Se ra mkha’ ’gro (1892–1940).

[34] Germano 1998: 81.

achievements have already been addressed, I will focus my discussion on Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan as an example of a monastic Treasure revealer in charge of a large religious encampment.[35]

More popularly known by his followers in Tibet as A chos mkhan po or Mkhan po a khyug,[36] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan was born in 1927 to a family belonging to the Khrom thog clan in Khrom, Dpal yul County, Dkar mdzes TAP.[37] His early religious studies took place mainly under Sde gzhung a 'jam sprul sku kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1885–1952) at the monastic scriptural seminary (*bshad grwa*) of Khrom rdo khol. Sde gzhung a 'jam sprul sku introduced him to the *lam 'bras* practice as well as to other influential teachers such as Rdzong sar mkhan chen 'chi med.[38] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan is a fully-ordained monk and for many years in his youth was a personal attendant (*g.yog po*) of the great teacher and abbot of Rdzogs chen monastery, A rig mkhan chen padma tshe dbang.[39] As in the case of most Treasure revealers, his career as a *gter ston* was prophesied by prominent Buddhist personalities, such as Se ra yang sprul rin po che (1925–1988)[40] and the late Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs. In addition, his destiny was announced in a number of prophetic writings including the prophecies (*lung bstan*) of Nam mkha'i rdo rje (18th century), O rgyan 'gro 'dul gling pa (1757–?), Gter ston dri med 'od gsal gling pa (19th century), Padma 'gro 'dul

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[35] For an overview of Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs see Germano 1998 and Terrone 2008. See also Versluys 2001 for an English translation of Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's biography authored by Mkhan po bsod dar rgyas.

[36] Dkon mchog bstan 'dzin reports also Mkhan chen bla ma a chos 2006: 509. According to a biographical story, his parents considered him a special boy, different from the other children since his body, and especially the palms of his hands manifested syllables (*yig 'bru*), predominantly in the shape of 'A'. Fearing that he would be cursed (*byad kha*), his parents gave him the name 'Khyu'u' or 'A khyug' (Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling 2002: 25). Nowadays, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan is still most popularly known by this name and the stories about the letters appearing on his body are very common in many areas of Khams.

[37] Phur pa bkra shis and 'Brug rgyal n.d.

[38] Dkon mchog bstan 'dzin 2006: 509. Chos sde chen po khrom rdo khol dgon is probably the prestigious Sa skya monastery Khrom rdo khog in the lower part of Khams (mdo khams smad) in Li thang. See Jackson 2003: 86.

[39] A rig padma tshe dbang, also known as A rig rin po che and Mkhan po pad tshe (1931–2001). His biography was recently published in the PRC under the title *Snyigs dus bstan pa'i sgron me thams cad mkhyen pa pad ma tshe dbang rin po che'i thun mong phyi'i mdzad rnam cung zad brjod pa skal bzang dad pa'i gsos sman* (Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 2006).

[40] Se ra yang sprul was the most popular name of this Treasure revealer, whose other name was O rgyan drag rtsal gling pa as well as Gter ston rig 'dzin gsang sngags gling pa. For a short biography of Se ra yang sprul see Dkon mchog bstan 'dzin 2006: 507–508.

sangs sngags gling pa (also known as Dri med ’od zer, 1881–1924), and Mchog ’gyur bde chen gling pa (1829–1870).[41] He was recognised as the incarnation of the eighth-century Great Perfection master Vimalamītra and the seventeenth-century Treasure revealer Klong gsal snying po (1625–1692).[42] A rig rin po che padma tshe dbang lhun grub (1931–2001) and Lcags mdud sprul padma rig ’dzin gave him the name ’Jam dbyangs lung rtogs rgyal mtshan.[43] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan studied under many teachers including Khrom dge mdo sngags bstan ’dzin (also known as Khrom dge a rig) and A ’dzoms rgyal sras ’gyur med rdo rje (1895–?). However, it was especially the meetings with Se ra yang sprul rin po che and Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs that were profoundly influential for his religious career, confirming he was the reincarnation of Rig ’dzin klong gsal snying po.[44] From Se ra yang sprul he received the transmission of all his Treasures and was empowered as the custodian of his Treasure teachings (*chos bdag*).

In the summer of 1980,[45] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan founded the religious college (*chos grwa*) Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling in Khrom thar (Dbal shul)[46] at the feet of Mount Ya chen dpal ri gnyis pa assisted by approximately fifty disciples. Soon, however, with the support of Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs, more and more monks asked to study with him and the encampment expanded rapidly. By 1991[47] the resident population was apparently so high that the *chos sgar* was divided into eight sections or ‘complexes’ (*gling*) with two teachers each (*bstan bdag*). These are the sections for the monks called the ‘five complexes of the hero’ (*dpa’ bo’i gling lnga*): 1. Rig pa rang grol gling, 2. Chos nyid ’od gsal gling, 3. ’Khor ’das chos nyid gling, 4. Kun bzang bsam gtan gling, 5. Bde chen thar lam gling, and three complexes for the nuns called the ‘three complexes of the heroines’ (*dpa’ mo’i gling gsum*), namely 1. Kun bzang bde chen gling, 2. Bde stong zung ’jug gling, and 3. Bden gnyis zung ’jug gling.[48]

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[41] Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling 2002: 14–22.
[42] Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling 2002: 22.
[43] Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling 2002: 33.
[44] Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling 2002: 36.
[45] Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling 2002: 84. The auto/biography reports the iron-monkey year of the 17th Tibetan calendar cycle. But if this were true that year corresponds to the year 2040–2041, hence the writer probably meant 16th *rab byung*.
[46] Dkon mchog bstan ’dzin 2006: 509.
[47] Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling 2002: 84. The iron-sheep year.
[48] Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling 2002: 85.

Mount Ya chen dpal ri gnyis pa has a special place in Khrom thar. According to Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's autobiography, many religious personalities including O rgyan drag rtsal gling pa, A rig rdo rje 'dzin pa, and Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs exalted and praised this mountain as the Glorious Copper Coloured Mountain (Zangs mdog dpal ri), the mythic pure land residence of Guru Rinpoche, hence the name Ya chen dpal ri gnyis pa (Ya chen, the Second Glorious Mountain).[49] In 1998, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan 'opened' one of the doors, the north-western gate, of Mount Ya chen during a public ritual attended by thousands of people, many of whom were Chinese devotees.

Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's charisma, sainthood, and ascendancy as Buddhist master benefited from a series of spectacular 'openings' of religious sites (*gnas sgo 'byed pa* or *gnas sgo phye*) and numerous Treasure retrievals that made him one of the most well-known Treasure revealers in the past decades. Additionally, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's fame is also associated with miraculous phenomena such as manifestations of divine images and 'lights' on his body and in the skies of Ya chen sgar and also by the production of bodily relics (*ring srel*).[50] These relics are small spheres believed to be precious bodily remains emerging from the cremated remnants of highly realised practitioners, but apparently also produced by living beings.[51] The gateways to Treasure troves (*gter gnas*) from where the revealer extracts (*bzhes*) the Treasure casket, or in other words gates to prophesied sanctuaries or hidden valleys (*sbas yul*), Treasure 'doors' (*gter sgo*) are an essential concept in Treasure revelation lore. According to the tradition, when Padmasambhava concealed his sacred items and scriptures in geographical locales, he entrusted a number of deities and other supernatural beings as protectors of the sacred places (*gnas*).[52] When the time comes for the

[49] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan ca. 2003: 197.

[50] The *ring srel*, or *ring bsrel*, are small whitish, pill-like spheres or pearls that usually manifest from the ashes at a cremation site and are believed to encapsulate a highly realised saintly being's essence and therefore to be powerful blessed talismans. Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's body apparently spontaneously generates *ring srel* constantly. For a study of *ring srel* and of other signs of sainthood in Tibetan Buddhism, see Martin 1994. As for the phenomenon of what I call 'lights,' Treasure revealers understand them to be spontaneous manifestations of the Sambhogakāya realm (*rang snang longs sku'i zhing khams rten dang brten pa*) as shown, for instance, in a photo opening the second volume of Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's *gsung 'bum*. Photos of 'lights' of different shapes and intensity are distributed among his devotees.

[51] Germano 2004: 71.

[52] Thondup 1986: 243, n. 158.

place to release its Treasure, the revealer opens it with his physical presence or just his intention.[53]

Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan started his career as a Treasure revealer in 1981 after he received a series of prophetic visions. In one of his visions the deity Ekajati (Sngags srung ma)[54] appeared to him in the form of a woman from A mdo covered with jewels and told him that he had to follow her as the time had come for him to unlock a [Treasure] site (*gnas sgo 'byed pa*) at Khe me long rdo rje[55] not far from Ya chen. Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's autobiography explains that Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and Pad nor rin po che (Grub dbang rin po che padma nor bu) encouraged him in the cultivation of visionary and revelation skills as they saw that this would provide him the opportunity to improve human beings' welfare and to benefit the world. Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan thus opened his first Treasure door (*gter sgo*) in Khe me long rdo rje in a place dedicated to the protectors of three families (*rigs gsum mgon po*). The event was accompanied by a series of miraculous phenomena such as the appearance of syllables in space and a large image of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara (Thugs rje chen po), who announced to him that he would open the Treasure doors of the other eighteen sacred places.[56] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan has opened a number of hidden valleys and Treasure troves and his openings have apparently been marked by miraculous events including foot prints (*zhabs rjes*), hand prints (*phyag rjes*), and the retrieval of Treasures articles such as statues of Rta mgrin (Hayagrīva), Guru Rinpoche, the Five Dharma Protector Kings (Rgyal chen sku lnga), ritual daggers (*phur pa*; Skt. *kīla*), and ambrosia (*bdud rtsi*).

As a Treasure revealer, however, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan is known more for his material revelations (*sa gter*) rather than for his mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*). In fact, in his three volume *gsung 'bum* only a couple of compositions are actual *dgongs gter*.[57]

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[53] Thondup 1986: 77–78.

[54] Ekajati is one of the most important *gter ma* protectors (*gter srung*) (Thondup 1986: 70). According to the Treasure tradition when Gu ru rin po che/ Padmasambhava concealed his scriptures and material items he entrusted them to many deities, both worldly and realised, authorising them as Treasure protectors.

[55] Famous sacred place in Khrom thar, Dkar mdzes TAP.

[56] Ya chen o rgyan bsam gtan gling 2002: 64–65.

[57] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan. *Gdod ma'i mgon po grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum*. 3 vols. Dpal yul, Sichuan: Ya rtse o rgyan bsam gtan gling, (no date of publication available). On different occasions during my several visits of Ya chen sgar between 2000 and 2006 and conversations with a

Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan has authored a total of 59 writings including three auto/biographical essays as ordinary public or 'outer' biography (*thun mong phyi'i rnam thar*), extraordinary personal 'inner' biography (*thun min nang gi rnam thar*), and 'secret' biography (*gsang ba'i don gi rnam thar*), a collection of spiritual advice for practice (*Thugs dam gnad bskul man ngag bcud bsdus*),[58] a guidebook to sacred places (*Brda kho mkha' 'gro'i gnas yig*),[59] a guidebook to Ya chen (*Ya chen dpal ri gnyis pa'i gnas kyi ngo sprod mdor bsdus*),[60] and a collection of spiritual teachings. These include personal compositions such as supplications (*gsol 'debs*), guru yoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*), propitiating liturgies (*bskang gso*), invocations to protectors (*srung ma'i gsol mchod*), yogic applications (*las tshogs*), juniper fumigation liturgies (*bsang mchod*), prayers (*zhabs brtan*), words of blessing (*shis brjod*), and *sādhanas* to tutelary deities (*yi dam sgrub thabs*). Among the *yi dam sgrub thabs*, only two appear to be *gter ma* teachings, the *Zab gsang rdo rje snying po las thugs rje chen po dri med padma dkar po'i gsang sgrub byin brlabs nye brgyud*, which is a co-authored revelation by A khyug (Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan) and O rgyan drag rtsal gling pa (Se ra yang sprul rin po che).[61] A second *gter ma* included in the *gsung 'bum* is the *Thugs rje chen po dri med padma dkar po'i gsang sgrub sman khrus bdud rtsi'i bum bzang*, which was also produced by the combined efforts of O rgyan drag rtsal gling pa and Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, where the latter expanded (*je rgyas*) the teaching of the former by adding (*brgyan pa*) a section on the empowerment teaching (*dbang bshad*).[62]

That the Treasures of a fully-ordained monastic Treasure revealer focus more on material excavations rather than the composition of revealed scriptures and texts is not uncommon. Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs apparently also revealed a number of Rdzogs chen-based scriptures.[63] However, he was better known for the retrieval of material items, substances, and caskets, rather than mind Treasure

number of *mkhan pos* I have been told that Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan did reveal some Treasure scriptures, which are collected separately. I am, however, unable to confirm such information.

[58] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan n.d.: vol. 2, 1–194.

[59] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan n.d.: vol. 2, 204–21.

[60] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan n.d.: vol. 2, 195–203.

[61] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan n.d.: vol. 1, 51–63.

[62] Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan n.d.: vol. 1, 64–73. In the short colophon to the text the author reports that he acted as Treasure master (*chos bdag*) of Gter chen o rgyan drag rtsal gling pa (also known as Se ra yang sprul rin po che).

[63] Germano 1998: 94.

teachings. Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs’s *gsung ’bum*[64] on which Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan’s *opera omnia* was obviously modelled, contains 182 writings of which only one, the *mKha’ ’gro gsang ba yang thig las dgongs pa grol chen po gnyis med rang byung ye shes rgyud kyi rgyal po*, bears the marks of a *gter ma* composition.[65]

Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan’s revelations, therefore, seem to be predominantly material Treasures (*gter rdzas*) and only occasionally mind Treasures. How do these revelations fit into a Buddhist teacher’s world? What role do they play? And especially, how are they disseminated? Material Treasures, or earth Treasures (*sa gter*), are believed to have great power as objects (*gter rdzas*), which include ritual implements and statues of various divinities believed to have been handed down directly by Padmasambhava “without going through the hands of different kinds of people” thus “maintaining the purity and authenticity of the instructions”.[66] For instance, Tulku Thondup observes that the power of images representative of Guru Rinpoche (*sku tshab*) that have been revealed as Treasures lies in the fact that they have been blessed by Guru Rinpoche as inseparable from himself by merging his wisdom power into the images:

> The reason for the gradual discovery of the images in different periods of time (*brGyud Ma*) is the demonstration that Guru Rinpoche watches over Tibet with his kindness, forever, without ceasing; in addition it inspires his future followers to practice Dharma.[67]

Probably no one in Tibet has exceeded the fame of Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs’s revelations. His auto/biography is replete with anecdotes and reports of signs of accomplishments, miraculous events, and spectacular revelations, which generated great faith in the present

[64] *Chos rje dam pa yid bzhin nor bu ’jigs med phun tshogs ’byung gnas dpal bzang po’i gsung ’bum*. Edited by Ngag dbang blo gros. 3 vols. Hong Kong: Xianggang xinzhi chubanshe, 2002.

[65] Ngag dbang blo gros 2002: 106–107. The fact that in Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs’s collected writings this is the only Treasure teaching does not mean that he had not revealed more. In fact in Gser rta and Bla rung sgar it is very common to hear about the voluminous collection of Treasure scriptures (Germano 1998: 94). My point here is that he was popularly known to be a great Treasure revealer, and probably his fame was brought about by the spectacular excavations of earth Treasures rather than the revelations of Treasures texts. That the *Dgongs pa ye grol gyi rgyud*, as this teaching is also known, is a Treasure, is recognisable by the typical punctuation sign—the *gter shad* ༔—at the end of each line. See Gyatso 1996: 158.

[66] Thondup 1986: 62.

[67] Thondup 1986: 151.

spectators (*gdul bya rnams la dad rten du bzhag pa*).[68] Likewise, Grub dang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's activities are replete with miraculous events and a series of excavations of every kind of sacred Treasure article.[69] In *The Melodious Drum of the Gods*, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's biographical pamphlet, besides his autobiography in Tibetan and Chinese written for the increasing following of Chinese disciples, devotees can appreciate photos of some of the most miraculous deeds that Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan is believed to have performed in his life. These include the revelation of Treasure chests (*gter sgrom*), various Treasure statuettes including effigies of Padmasambhava (*gu ru sku*), spontaneously arisen scripts (*rang byung gi yi ge*) on various rocks and caves where he has meditated or revealed Treasures, and several other Treasure items (*gter rdzas*).[70]

In a style similar to that employed by his main mentor Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs in the administration of spiritual teachings and the organisation of his religious academy Bla rung sgar, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan too has created a structure that provides both scholastic and contemplative education to his students.[71] With the assistance of a group of seminary teachers (*mkhan po*) from Bla rung sgar, at Ya chen sgar Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan has created a long-term curriculum in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism at the end of which the monks can achieve the degree of *mkhan po*, or *mkhan mo* in the case of nuns, and thus themselves become teachers in their home monasteries. In addition to the study of the main scriptural classics of the scholastic tradition, which include the Vinaya monastic code, Mahāyāna philosophical treatises, and various traditional ancillary disciplines such as grammar, epistemology, poetry, and medicine, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan also requires a rigorous study of the Great Perfection meditative system, with an emphasis on the streamlined version of the *snying thig* or Seminal Heart tradition.

With his ability to combine extraordinary charismatic power emerging from his visionary virtues and revelatory skills with a commitment to supporting monastic ethics and encouraging the purity of monastic vows for both nuns and monks, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan has been able to create a large academic study centre where a population of thousands of disciples can receive traditional education from experienced instructors according to authentic forms

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[68] Bsod dar rgyas 1990: 69.
[69] Phur pa bkra shis and 'Brug rgyal n.d.
[70] Phur pa bkra shis and 'Brug rgyal n.d.
[71] See Germano 1998 for an essay on Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's Bla rung sgar.

of instruction. Given the influence of large-scale religious centres such as Ya chen sgar, religious education and traditional forms of instructing disciples in esoteric Tantric teachings are beginning to revive significantly after the heavy damage caused by decades of suppression and the massive departure into exile of thousands of religious leaders.

Gter chen Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje and Rdza mer chen Hermitage

The second group of Treasure revealers we consider in this essay is that of non-celibate Buddhist Tantric practitioners. These are predominantly householder-type of Tantric specialists (*khyim pa sngags pa*) who are married and often live with their families. In a few cases they are supported in their activities by their spiritual consort (*gsang yum*). Consorts are not only considered pivotal in the achievements of Tantric yogic exercises, but in the specific case of Treasure revelation, they are believed to have a central role in the revelation process as well. According to my data, in present-day Tibet non-celibate Treasure revealers significantly outnumber those who are fully-ordained monastics. Among the most renowned non-celibate Treasure revealers are Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje (b. 1921), Bkra shis rgyal mtshan (b. 1957) and his consort Dpal chen lha mo (b. 1965), Bdud 'dul mgon po (d. 2003), O rgyan sku gsum gling pa (b. 1933),[72] and Nam sprul 'jigs med phun tshogs (b. 1944).[73]

In order to discuss the role of non-celibate Treasure revealers in the contemporary Buddhist world of eastern Tibet, I will focus on the story of one among the most prolific and active Treasure revealers in Tibet today, Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje, with whom I have conducted extensive fieldwork research from 1998 to 2006. Having studied with numerous religious masters of diverse sectarian affiliation, his curriculum is quite eclectic. However, he has received transmissions predominantly from Rnying ma and Bka' brgyud lineages and has focused his learning on the corpus of *gter ma* literature. Therefore, Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje's Buddhist practice principally emphasises Tantras and esoteric teachings belonging to the Rnying ma school with a special focus on the Seminal Heart (*snying thig*) practices of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*).

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[72] A bu dkar lo 2003: 63.
[73] 'Od gsal mtha' yas 1997: 1.

In his autobiography entitled *The Dance of the Pure Vajra*, Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje writes that he was born in 1921 to a family of herders living on the pastures between Skye rgu mdo and Nang chen.[74] Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje apparently was drawn to a spiritual life very early in his youth and started travelling across the Tibetan plateau and experiencing visions in his teens in the 1930s. During his travels he occasionally joined village teachers from whom he learned basic reading and writing skills such as lama Bkra shis chos 'phel, who was his first mentor and spiritual master.

Most of Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje's education has featured Tantric studies characterised by an approach that favoured the practice of diverse systems of meditation and yoga with various masters rather than the scholastic study of texts as emphasised in the monasteries. In his early years he also lived an itinerant lifestyle that took him to many different places in Tibet and abroad, thus encountering many masters and religious figures from different religious sectarian affiliations. Such a long cathartic journey took him from the rolling pastures and wild forests of Khams to the dry wind-beaten plateau of central Tibet. Once there in the early 1930s, he studied with some of the most respected Buddhist teachers and religious leaders of twentieth-century Tibet, including the Dge lugs pa lama Phur lcog thub bstan byams pa tshul khrims bstan 'dzin (b. 1902?), the Rwa greng master Mtshan nyid bsod bstan rin po che (1892–1960), Sa skya khri chen ngag dbang mthu stobs dbang phyug (1900–1950), and especially the young sixteenth Karma pa rang 'byung rig pa'i rdo rje (1924–1981). All these masters had a profound influence on Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje's religious education and approach to meditative practice. In particular, the Karma pa and Mtshan nyid bsod bstan rin po che seemed to have seen the clear signs of a Treasure revealer in Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje. His pilgrimage also brought him to cross the Himalayas to visit Bhutan and Sikkim. In Darjeeling he apparently spent some time at Yid dga' chos gling monastery in Ghoom (also called the Ghoom Monastery) where he studied with the well-known Dge lugs pa master Dge bshes ngag dbang skal bzang, more popularly known as Gro mo dge bshes rin po che (1866–1934/1936).[75]

Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje furthered his studies when he returned to Khams during the late 1930s. In Nang chen he became a close disciple

[74] *Rig 'dzin nus ldan rdo rje'i rnam thar bsdus pa dri med rdo rje'i zlos gar* (*The Dance of the Pure Vajra: A Brief Biography of the Awareness-holder Nus ldan rdo rje*, Gnas chen padma, Skye rgu mdo, 1997), henceforth *The Dance of the Pure Vajra*.

[75] Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje 1998: f. 6b.

of Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje, the well-known Dpal me mkhyen brtse kung bzang ’gro ’dul (1897–1946), one of the major Bka’ brgyud religious personalities of that area and founder of the Dpal me mdo sngags bshad sgrub gling monastery in Shar mda’ in Nang chen (in today’s Yushu TAP). Himself a Treasure revealer, Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje introduced Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje to various cycles of Treasure teachings he had revealed. He also instructed him in the practice of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*), considered one of the highest contemplative systems and the core of the Rnying ma tradition, and the Great Seal (*phyag rgya chen mo*) the paramount meditative system for the Bka’ brgyud school. With such instructions Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje thus practised for years under the apprenticeship of this master and entered multiple meditation retreats to refine his understanding and achieve spiritual realisation through yogic asceticism (*brtul shugs*) and the practice of austerities (*dka’ spyad*).

Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s eagerness to learn more and refine his contemplative acumen brought him to Go ’jo near Sde dge to meet and study with another major and respected religious figure, the lay teacher and *gter ston* Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje (1926–ca. 1978). At Nyag bla sgar, Byang chub rdo rje’s religious community, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje continued to receive instructions on the Great Perfection and to study the revealed scriptures of his master, often living in retreat in the area. Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s revelation skills and spiritual achievements left a mark in the area where he excavated numerous Treasure articles such as Treasure chests and various sacred semi-precious stones that he left in local temples and shrines. His impact was fortified by the fact that one of the local chieftains in Nang chen, Dzi la dpon, apparently endorsed his activities and became one of his most assiduous devotees, offering him not only patronage, but also sponsoring the establishment of Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s first religious centre, the Me ’bar dgon (The Blazing Fire Monastery), on the rocky hills towering over the ’Do yus mda’ village approximately 25 kilometres from Skyes rgu mdo town (Yushu TAP).

During the dramatic and catastrophic era of the Cultural Revolution, like many other religious personalities, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje faced extreme difficulties and hardships. Accused of enhancing superstition and backwardness among his compatriots, he suffered heavy verbal and physical abuse and public humiliation during several

struggle sessions. After being imprisoned,[76] he was sent to a labour camp near Skye rgu mdo. During those years, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje managed to secretly continue his religious practices and he recounts that he experienced regular visions and dreams that linked him to the king Ge sar. In particular, he had many visions of Ge sar’s assistant and personal physician Kun dga’ nyi ma since Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje was recognised to be his reincarnation by ’Jam dpal nor bu.[77] This experience enriched his spiritual realisation and gave him the strength to continue his practice and to provide spiritual guidance to his fellow Tibetans from the labour camp.[78]

Soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life was predominantly dedicated to the revelations of Treasure cycles. With nearly four hundred Treasure scriptures (*gter chos*) and pure visions (*dag snang*) collected in twelve volumes, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje is one of the most prolific revealers along with figures such as Rig ’dzin nyi ma and Nam sprul ’jigs med phun tshogs who live in Snyan lung near Gser rta. His *gter* teachings include a number of *rdzogs chen* texts and a variety of ritual practices (*sgrub thabs*). Additionally, in the past three decades Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje has established five mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) predominantly in the Nang chen area. Among these is his long term residence, the Gnas chen padma shel ri khrod or The Mountain Hermitage on the Crystal Mountain Gnas chen padma, which is located approximately 20 kilometres from Shar mda’. He has recently resided and taught at the Rdo rje mer chen dge dgon bkra shis chos gling, a reviving mountain hermitage under the administration of the Dpal me monastery, on the slopes of Mount Rdza mer chen not far Shar mda’ in Nang chen. Since 2001, following the invitation of the second Dpal me mkhyen brtse, Chen chos rdo rje bde chen rdo rje mdo sngags gling pa, and the current spiritual leader of the Mer chen dge dgon named Rgyal mtshan rin po che, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje oversees the meditation training at Rdza mer chen Hermitage and functions as spiritual advisor to the nuns who enter into long-term retreat in the

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[76] Bde chen ’od sgal rdo rje’s oral communication. Ri phug kha Hermitage, Mount Gnas chen padma (Yushu TAP), August 2000. Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje was imprisoned during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s. He served three months in jail in Chab mdo first and then a five-month sentence in a prison in Xining. Charged of being ‘class enemy’, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje often faced heavy struggle sessions where he was publicly denounced and verbally abused. See Terrone ForthcomingB.

[77] Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje 1999.

[78] Bkra shis rgyal mtshan’s oral communication. Ri phug kha Hermitage, Mount Gnas chen padma (Yushu TAP), August 2000.

practice building (*sgrub khang*) of the nunnery. Renowned for his experience in and dedication to *rdzogs chen* practice, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje is constantly visited by monks and nuns who seek advice on their practice. Additionally, devotees visit him asking for prognostications and advice for more mundane reasons and the laity visit him requesting him to perform funerary rites often on behalf of relatives and parents. The majority of devotees are also interested in obtaining one of Bde chen ’od sgal rdo rje renowned talismans called *mu tig tsha tsha* (pearl clay devotional figurine) and Rta mgrin ril bu, consecrated pills that Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje describes as having been inspired by the deity Hayagrīva.

Beyond their teaching schedules, the majority of today’s non-celibate Treasure revealers also offer services in the form of rituals, divinations, funerary rites, healing practices, and often more mundane activities such as weather control in order to increase their income and sustain their activities. Therefore, in his focus on healing, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje is not alone among Treasure revealers; a number of Treasure revealers perform activities related to charismatic healing and the production of consecrated pills (*maṇi ril bu*). This is the case for Treasure revealers like Mthu ldan rdo rje in ’Jig ’dril (Ch. Jiuzhi; Rnga ba/Aba TAP), who is a Treasure revealer and works as a Tibetan traditional doctor at home combining the use of both medical knowledge and charismatic healing practices.[79] The Treasure revealer Lha rgyal rin po che, who currently lives in Padma county (Ch. Baima; Rnga ba/Aba TAP), is well-known for the production of consecrated pills that he dispenses regularly to his devotees.[80] The link between healing, health, and Treasures is thus not an unusual phenomenon in the revelation tradition. Indeed, numerous Treasure revealers are among the most famous contributors to the history of Tibetan traditional medicine and astrology (*sman rtsi rig pa*).[81]

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[79] Two short biographies of Mthu ldan rdo rje have been recently published in Chinese: *Xuecheng yaowang: dazhizhe dayishi jinmei dudeng roubei duojie* (*The Great Doctor from the Land of Snows: The Great Sage and Doctor ’Jigs med mthu ldan rol pa’i rdo rje*), and *Dayuanmang daoshi jianli: dazhizhe dayishi jinmei dudeng roubei duojie jianli ruyi baoshu* (*The Wish-fulfilling Treasure Tree: The Biographical Notes of a Great Perfection Teacher: The Biographical Notes of ’Jigs med mthu ldan rol pa’i rdo rje*).

[80] Lha rgyal rin po che. Interview. November 2005. Lha rgyal rin po che lives with his wife and children at his household a few miles south of Padma Township, Mgo log TAP.

[81] See for instance, Gter ston grwa pa mngon shes (1012–1090), Gter ston gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug (1212–1270), and Gter ston ratna gling pa (1403–1479), among many others (Byams pa phrin las 2000). Mgo log seems to have been home to many

Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s teachings draw heavily on *gter ma* material both from his root teachers Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje and Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje, as well as from his own revealed Treasures. More than being concerned with the scholastic and philosophical aspects of Buddhist doctrine, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje is a supporter of meditative practice and contemplative exercises. Asceticism and the intense performance of meditative practice are expressed abundantly in his revelations and writings. Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje is particularly concerned with *rdzogs chen* practice and his contemplation system is founded on both generation (*bskyed rim*) and completion (*rdzogs rim*) stages practices. However, some of his *rdzogs chen* material derives also from the revelations of his teacher, Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje, thus contributing to a more diverse view of the system. Most of Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s *sādhana* ritual practices (*sgrub thabs*) are focused on visualisation and Tantric rituals associated with various deities such as Hayagrīva (Rta mgrin) and the triad of Gu ru rin po che (*bla*), Great Perfection (*rdzogs*), and Avalokiteśvara (*thugs*), which together represent the classic comprehensive corpus of a traditional complete set of *gter ma* revelation *bla rdzogs thugs gsum*. As Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje himself claims:

> The Treasure teachings I have received cover *bla sgrub* (*sādhana* to the Gu ru [rin po che]), *Rdzogs chen*, and *thugs sgrub* (*sādhana* to Avalokiteśvara). Since I am an individual who has the entire path to enlightenment (*sangs rgyas kyi lam*), I am a great Treasure revealer (*gter chen*).[82]

Among his revelations are also some scriptures on the practice of channels, winds, and seminal nuclei (*rtsa rlung thig le*) relevant to *rdzogs rim* training as well as materials on the *snying thig* doctrine. Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s collection of revelations also features multiple Treasures objects (*gter rdzas*) including Treasure caskets (*gter sgrom*), ritual daggers (*phur pa*), various statues (*sku ’dra* and

Treasure revealers who have produced medicine-related revelations and worked as healers and/or traditional physicians not only in the past but also in more modern times. See, for instance, A skyes gter ston mkha’ spyod gling pa (1893–1939), Mchig gter padma dbang chen (1906–1959), and Rgyal rong sman pa bsam grub rdo rje (1909–1979) (A bu dkar lo 2000).

[82] Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje. Interview. Rdza mer chen Hermitage, Shar mda’, Nang chen. August 18, 2001.

sku tshab), and yellow scrolls (*shog gser*).[83] Some of his earth Treasure (*sa gter*) excavations were apparently witnessed publicly (*khrom gter*) while others took place privately while he was in meditation retreat.[84] His public revelations of sacred objects are said to have been observed by crowds of devotees gathered for the occasion. While Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje has guarded a number of his material Treasures, he has also donated some of his sacred Treasures to the temples and monasteries in the areas where he discovered them.[85] A number of revelations were accompanied by the performance of other supernatural skills such as leaving handprints (*phyag rjes*) and footprints (*zhabs rjes*) on rocks. These, like other miraculous deeds, are often considered central to a Treasure revealer’s career since they help to promote the Treasure revealer’s credibility and contribute to the assertion of his power over natural phenomena.[86]

The opening of a Treasure place (*gter gnas* or *gter kha*) is often followed by other equally important actions meant to maintain the sacrality of the event and the power of the sacred place. Vowed to preserve the significance of the religious site, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje would often leave a ‘replacement Treasure’ or ‘substitute Treasure’ (*gter tshab*) in the crack from where the original *gter ma* was extracted. These actions are central to a Treasure revealer’s ability to maintain a connection with the land of Tibet and the ability to personally create and re-create a religious landscape with spiritual control over geographical areas, to mediate between ethereal forces (the local deities and protective gods of the land) and the recipients of the spiritual transmission, and to establish new religious sites. I call such a particular phenomenon of the reciprocal interactions between Treasure revealers, Treasures, and the land ‘the ecology of revelation’, and I argue that this is a fundamental socio-religious ethic among most Treasure revealers that represents respect for the environment and awareness of humans’ connection to the Tibetan land, which in turn fuels a sense of nationalism among devotees.

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[83] Only a few of these objects have been preserved. Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje managed to prevent a few from destruction during the Cultural Revolution, and a few other have been saved by some of his closest disciples.

[84] Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s oral communication. Ri phug kha Hermitage, Mount Gnas chen Pad ma. Skye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 2000.

[85] Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s oral communication. Gnas chen pad ma Hermitage, Mount Gnas chen pad ma. Skye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 1999.

[86] Many people report that Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje has left a number of handprints (*phyag rjes*) across eastern Tibet especially in the Ge rong area of Qinghai Province of the PRC.

Just like Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje is contributing to the ongoing re-appropriation of traditional forms of instruction and religious education for religious adepts, but he is committed to a high standard of instruction based primarily, if not uniquely, on personal experience. For Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje, knowledge relates to experience, and therefore, an emphasis on advancing one’s experience is key to his lifelong spiritual trajectory and to his teaching style. As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje represents a class of religious professionals, the *sngags pas*, who live their religiosity in close contact with the mundane world of the householder, ideologically transforming every element of their ordinary existence into an opportunity to train the mind and awaken their awareness to the realisation of ultimate reality. Instead of renouncing the worldly appeals of this existence by pursuing soteriological goals through the rigorous commitment to monastic vows, codes of discipline, and scholastic studies, he has embraced another way to achieve enlightenment, that of the non-celibate Tantric adept. Such an esoteric path is believed to offer the achievement of realisation through various rituals such as propitiating local gods and religious protectors but also performing yogic techniques, contemplative exercises, and Tantric practices including deity visualisations, manipulating inner subtle energies, and esoteric rituals such as sexual union with an appropriate consort, called ‘the path of skilful means’ (*thabs lam*).

Another difference between the two teachers is that unlike Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s aim is not the formation of highly educated *mkhan pos* or scholastic experts on scriptures and philosophical treatises. Rather his emphasis is on the reinforcement of contemplation-based practices and the traditional dissemination of the Great Perfection system where the study is focused on the nature of the mind rather than on the intellectual understanding of phenomena.

Bde chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s contemplative orientation and expertise emerge during his regular visits to nuns and monks in long-term retreat in the enclosed meditation building (*sgrub khang*) of Rdza mer chen. There he instructs them through a full program of contemplative and ritual practice ranging from lengthy preliminary practices (*sngon ’gro*) to Great Perfection training and the performance of *sādhanas* or visualisation techniques.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the first part of this paper I have shown how the Treasure revelation tradition has been directly involved in the recent development of non-monastic communities belonging to the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism in some areas of eastern Tibet and how these communities centred on Treasure revealers have contributed to the large-scale revitalisation of Buddhism in contemporary Tibet. In my view this can be attributed to two major factors. The first is the weakening of monastic-centred power caused by the Chinese government's early reforms, political pressure, and the local authorities' control over the last four decades. This has resulted in religious practitioners looking elsewhere for forms of religious authority and traditional instruction. The second factor is the increasing interest on the part of Tibetans to re-appropriate traditional elements of cultural and religious identity not only concerned with the scholastic learning of Buddhist thought, but also with the contemplative and meditative spheres that so characterise Tibetan Buddhism. Among the many Tibetan Buddhist figures, Treasure revealers as a class of Tantric adepts incarnate the miraculous powers associated with expertise in the rigours of contemplative practice, a quality increasingly appreciated in a region of the world continually shaped by factors outside of its control.

This essay has thus shown how a number of Treasure revealers have created a new religious environment that goes beyond the monastery in the form of religious encampments and mountain hermitages. That these forms of religious community have become increasingly important in the Tibetan religious landscape is evident from the continually increasing population residing at these religious centres as well as from the fact that their religious material is not only Rnying ma but also includes doctrines from other schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

In the second part of this paper I presented two brief case studies of the life and activities of two currently active Treasure revealers, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, the fully-ordained monk and leader of Ya chen sgar, and Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje, the non-celibate Tantric practitioner teaching at the Rdza mer chen Hermitage in Nang chen. While differing in approaches and methods in their teaching—the former emphasising a more scholastic approach to monastic study as well as meditation, the latter stressing almost solely experience-based contemplative practices—both masters represent a unique blend of

charismatic leadership and power represented by their appropriation of the Treasure revelation system with the respective authority of the monastic tradition and non-celibate Tantric tradition.

This essay, therefore, demonstrates that despite the forces of modernity under the control of Chinese government's economic expansion and political agenda that are continually affecting Tibetan cultural and religious developments, some Tibetan leaders have re-gained access to traditional forms of religious authority and charismatic leadership. Treasure revealers in particular have proved themselves to be powerful catalysts of religious revival in contemporary Tibet.

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‘LOCAL COMMUNITY RITUALS’ IN BHUTAN: DOCUMENTATION AND TENTATIVE READING[1]

FRANÇOISE POMMARET

Two religious schools of Tantric Buddhism have shaped the history and the religious traditions of Bhutan: The ’Brug pa Bka’ brgyud pa and the Rnying ma pa. The landscape is dotted with Buddhist architectural structures from monasteries to humble *mchod rten* and prayer-flags. Buddhist concepts shape the thoughts and life of the people, religious ceremonies are performed on official occasions, and grand religious festivals and rituals are sponsored by the state.

However, besides these very Buddhist marks of religious devotion, there is a wide range of rituals performed in the villages that have non-Buddhist and Buddhist features. They are apotropaic or dedicated to deities who are believed to have a direct impact on the daily life and the prosperity of a family or a community.

It is well-known that Buddhism in the Himalayas has incorporated local deities, or *numina*, who reside in rivers, rocks, forests, and mountains and makes them part of an extensive pantheon. Called by the generic term of *’jig rten pa’i srung ma* or *spyi’i* [*ba’i*] *chos skyong*, they are the lowest in the hierarchy of the pantheon but not the least important. The worship of these local deities through appropriate rituals constitutes an essential part of the religious life of the Bhutanese. These deities have a volatile temperament: if pleased, they can grant prosperity, health, good harvest and abundant cattle; if angered, they will retaliate against the people by sending calamities. These aspects have been studied elsewhere and are well documented.[2]

Bhutan has an amazing variety of rituals destined to ward off evil spirits and to please local deities. While many of them bear

[1] This paper was presented at the 11th IATS, Bonn in August 2006 but is published in this volume.

Words have been rendered in Wylie transliteration when possible. However, the Bhutanese convention for transliterating Dzongkha has also been used. Additionally, because Bhutan has several non-written languages, some names have been kept in the Roman transcription used in Bhutan.

[2] See for examples among a wealth of publications: Blondeau & Steinkellner (eds) 1996; Blondeau (ed.) 1998; Karmay 1998; and Buffetrille & Diemberger (eds) 2002.

similarities with those found in the rest of the Buddhist Himalayas, some of them—probably because of particular historical circumstances and geographical specificities—are identified by the Bhutanese as *Bon chos*[3] and more particularly *Bon dkar*, a term which, in Bhutan, encompasses any belief or ritual which does not fall under what is considered to be Buddhist.[4] One may argue about the thin line between Buddhist and non-Buddhist practices in the ritual context of Tantric Buddhism in the Himalayas,[5] but it is important to take into account the Bhutanese viewpoint concerning rituals when studying them. For the Bhutanese, rituals that ward off evil spirits or propitiate local deities that are performed by practitioners who are neither Buddhist monks (*dge slong*) nor lay practitioners (*sgom chen*) are considered *Bon chos*. However in Bhutan, it is not a case of either/or. These practitioners, men or women, are usually devout Buddhists. However, when performing rituals dedicated to local deities, they become non-Buddhist practitioners. I will come back to that point later.

Whatever the religious denomination of these rituals, they are practices which are very much alive and are considered to be indispensable for the welfare of a community. Until the mid-1990s, they were not much talked about by the urbanised elite and sometimes frowned upon by the official Buddhist clergy, although everybody knew how much importance the villagers gave them.

This attitude experienced a shift when preserving the environment became an active government policy. In this perspective, the worship of local deities, which encourages respecting and not polluting their abodes (such as rivers, rocks, mountains, and forests), was seen as an

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[3] In this article, I will use terms with their meaning in the Bhutanese context. One will observe a significant semantic change compared to similar classical Tibetan terms. For example, *sgom chen* is equivalent to *chos pa*.

[4] The terms *Bon dkar* and *Bon chos* are never used in the Bon po literature. The term *Bon dkar* is found with a derogatory connotation in the Buddhist literature and especially among the Bka' brgyud pa school. The term *Bon chos* seems to be particular to Bhutan.

Karmay (1998: 290) explained the term Bon in the following manner: "It is to this system of beliefs that a certain number of Dunhuang documents including PT 972 and 1038 refer as Bon and its practitioners as *bon* or *bon po*. This Bon must of course be distinguished from what one calls the Svastika Bon of the later period which is a reorganisation of this Bon along Buddhist philosophical and institutional lines with gShen rab Mi bo as the central figure from the eleventh century onwards". It is well-known that in the *Nine ways of Bon*, the first two deal with divination and rituals to local gods (Snellgrove 1987: 407). However I will not risk here any suggestion, and mention this simply for reference.

[5] This has been debated particularly by Samuel 1993 and 2005.

existing and even a traditional system in which the western concepts regarding the environment could easily fit and be propagated.[6] At the same time, faced with rapid development, changes of lifestyle and globalisation, the Bhutanese started taking a keen interest in their local history and customs, including the local rituals surrounding archery, the national game.[7] This interest was also encouraged by the government policy of cultural preservation.[8]

The first papers on rituals were written by Bhutanese in the 1980s (Wangmo 1985, Dorji 1987) and in communications published at the turn of the twenty-first century (Dorji 1999, Choden 1999, Pelgen 2000, Dorji 2002, Pelgen 2003).[9] In 2002 the subject was undertaken as a group study by the Centre of Bhutan Studies in Thimphu, whose director Dasho Karma Ura had a keen interest in it.[10] The result was the publication in 2004 of *Wayo, Wayo*, a collective work made of contributions on local rituals in different areas of Bhutan. The trend is continuing with more studies being published in 2006 (Dorji, Pelgen) and more articles being published in the Bhutanese newspapers on rituals and the importance of local deities in daily life,[11] especially by the *Bhutan Observer* since its launch in June 2006 in its Dzongkha as well as in its English versions.[12] Since 1999, the development of BBS, the national television, has also contributed to this interest through cultural programmes which feature the traditions of Bhutan.

The explosion of the media combined with the strong attachment of the Bhutanese for their traditions, an increasing awareness about the specificities of Bhutan, and the desire to make them known to the

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[6] Ura 2004: 35–71.

[7] Chang Dorji 2001. See also *Bhutan Times* dated 2006/7/23 "Archery: the money, the Tsips and the dancing girls".

[8] Preservation of environment and culture are two pillars of the 'Gross National Happiness' (GNH), a concept which today guides many government policies. The general national policy is outlined in the document *Bhutan 2020—a Vision for Peace Prosperity and Happiness* (Planning Commission, Thimphu: 1999), which refers to the need to protect and promote cultural heritage and to adapt Bhutanese institutions in ways which promote cultural awareness, conserve national heritage and strengthen cultural identity.

[9] My own interest and studies on the subject go back to the mid-eighties and references to them are given in the bibliography.

[10] Ura 2004.

[11] In 2008 Bhutan had three newspapers: *Kuensel* published on Wednesday and Saturday in English, Dzongkha and Nepali editions; the *Bhutan Times* published in English only on Wednesday and Sunday and the *Bhutan Observer* published on Friday in English and Dzongkha editions.

[12] *Bhutan Observer*, 28 July 2006: "Holy snakes halt road-widening works", and *Kuensel* "The Hiss of Curiosity", 3 August 2006.

outside world as well as government policies have probably created a synergy which has allowed the interest in local rituals to gain momentum. One of the telling signs might be the 'ABTO festivals list 2006'. Every year the Association of Bhutanese Tour-operators (ABTO) publishes a list of the most spectacular festivals; in 2006, for the first time an extensive list of local festivals and rituals was added to the standard list.

DOCUMENTING RITUALS

It is in this context that in 2001 the Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS), which is one the colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan,[13] started a three-year project with financial assistance from the UNESCO on the documentation of intangible cultural heritage.[14] After consultation, it was decided to focus on the documentation of specific village rituals. Their selection was made taking into consideration the time frame of the project, the dates in the Bhutanese calendar, the uniqueness of the rituals, the season (knowing that the monsoon months are not suitable for field trips in Bhutan), and the availability of the participants for the project. Participants were selected among the ILCS lecturers, which meant that besides their work and classes, they had to carry out this project without disturbing the ILCS students' academic year. Therefore this project entailed a certain amount of logistics, all the more since ILCS started this project from nothing: equipment had to be purchased and an audio-visual unit established at ILCS, two types of training had to be given to the lecturers selected after they expressed their interest in the work, one on ethnographic research and documentation and the other on audio-visual documentation and film making.[15]

The project encompassed research, training, preservation and dissemination functions. Its aims were:

[13] Founded in 2003 as a federation of existing colleges.

[14] Project UNESCO-ITH Project 553BHU4070.

[15] I conducted the first training, and my colleagues Yannick Jooris and Alain Gingras († 2004), carried out the audio-visual and film training. Each of us was very involved in the project in different capacities under the supervision of Lopen Lungtaen Gyatso, ILCS Principal. After the untimely demise of Alain Gingras in July 2004, we carried out the project until its term with UNESCO and have now included it in the regular activities of the ILCS audio-visual unit. However for the time being, substantial funding is lacking and the documentation is operated on a shoe-string budget.

- To safeguard the cultural heritage of Bhutan through the documentation of local practices, the maintaining of a database and the archiving of these practices for future references.

- To provide thorough training to Bhutanese project participants for undertaking field research involving audio-visual documentation and ethnographic methodology and practices, as well as to establish a database and maintain an inventory.

- To contribute to the strengthening of Bhutanese professional training and resources in the areas of safeguarding and fostering related academic research and establishing regional, national and international networks relating to this heritage.

- To raising awareness within Bhutanese society at large of the significance of conserving, maintaining and transmitting intangible cultural heritage.

- To produce educational documentaries for distribution and dissemination purposes.

The ILCS team and myself prepared a first database and a questionnaire as guidelines. This was done while taking into account several factors: the cultural and religious specificities of Bhutan, that it was the first time that such a survey was being conducted, and that the participants had no long-term training or experience in video-recording, ethnography, or fieldwork although they had a good knowledge of Bhutanese culture and different languages. The simple database was designed as a memo to help the participants in the field to gather all the necessary information and to be used to enter and standardise the data about each ritual in the ILCS documentation programme. The list of names in the database was to be a guideline for the study of rituals in general and we decided to list as many names of rituals as possible. A questionnaire was also to be used as a guideline and a memo for field interviews directed to people considered to be community and religious leaders.

The field documentation of rituals started in July 2003 and lasted until the end of 2004 under the UNESCO project. Each field trip had a crew composed of ILCS lecturers (a project director, two cameramen, a soundman) as well as Yannick Jooris or Alain Gingras as supervisors. Before going into the field, the project director had to gather any available information on the ritual. After the fieldtrip, all data, recordings, interviews, and videotapes were entered in their

totality in the ILCS documentation programme. This involved a lot of work as the interviews recorded in the field often had to be translated from the local language into Dzongkha and English. For each ritual, the tapes were numbered and given a code. Besides keeping each ritual videotape in its entirety for documentation and research purposes, film editing was also done and work is still continuing today. Some of these rituals were condensed as a 13 to 27 minute programme with Dzongkha commentary called 'ILCS TV series on rituals' which are broadcast on BBS.[16] As a Visual Arts department is planned at ILCS for the tenth five-year plan starting in 2008, the audio-visual unit and all this documentation will serve as a platform for this new department as well as a resource for the two departments of Bhutanese Language and Literature and Bhutanese and Himalayan Studies.[17]

'LOCAL COMMUNITY RITUALS' IN BHUTAN: A TENTATIVE READING

Each of the rituals has its own name, its own sequence of events, its practitioners etc., but one of their most striking common characteristics is that all these rituals are for the community and sponsored by the community. Therefore, for want of better term at this stage of research, the most appropriate generic expression might be 'local community rituals'. I will not present here a detailed study but will try to give a tentative reading of the community rituals, based on my personal fieldwork as well as on those that have been documented so far (see bibliography) including the ILCS Rituals project (see

[16] These are Lha bon, Jachung Michung, Hungla, Karphu, Namkha Tang Rabney, and Laya Aoley. A CD made of short three-minute clips of six rituals was also made for the UNESCO project final report. It contained Pamo, Gakhadokha, Kharamshing, Lha bon, Jachung Michung, Hungla. All the rituals names are in the Bhutanese transcription and not transliteration.

[17] In 2004, ILCS was also given the task to write, document and submit the candidature file of Bhutan for the Third Proclamation of the Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage at UNESCO. The cultural event chosen was the famous religious dance of the 'Drum beaters from Drametse' Drametse Ngacham (*Sgra mi rtse rnga 'chams*). Besides the written proposal, two videos were produced by ILCS, one of two hours and one of ten minutes. Bhutan was selected and the dance proclaimed by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in November 2005 (http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/06apa_uk.htm). Lopen Lungtaen Gyatso and Principal of ILCS has been presenting this dance at the 11th IATS Bonn conference and will publish his paper in the Bonn IATS proceedings. I will therefore not elaborate further but just want to mention another important ritual documentation project in which ILCS was and is involved.

Annex). Quoting Ramble (2000: 289), this reading is “nothing more than a partial treatment of a complex subject”. My interpretation is open to challenges as more and more field studies will be carried out. In fact even the term ‘ritual’ can be challenged and replaced by ‘festivals’ as these events last two to three days and are composed of a series of sequences which vary according to the ritual: liturgy, dances, games, procession, and fire purification as we will see later. The semantic field of the terms also varies according to local languages and I am using the term ‘ritual’ here as a convention.[18] One of the problems that the researcher faces in studying the local community rituals in Bhutan is that they are not grouped under one generic term which would immediately help to identify them. However they are sometimes called *lha gsol*.

Let’s now examine some of the salient features of these rituals:

- As mentioned earlier, they last two to three days, sometimes more and are composed of a particular series of events that have to be performed in a fixed order but that varies from place to place.

- Their common purpose is to ward off evil influences as well as bring prosperity to a well-defined community by pleasing local deities. Therefore their dates in the Bhutanese calendar often fall at plantation time or just after the harvest.

- People of a defined community bound by local circumstances—geography, history, language and common deities—assemble once a year at a fixed date to perform a ritual which will bring prosperity to the community. It is to be noted that people from other villages, even sometimes geographically close, do not participate nor come as spectators. The term ‘community’ also includes people originally from the place but who work and live in town. They usually make a point to come back to the village for this occasion, but tend not bring their spouse with them if the spouse is from another region.[19]

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[18] On this subject see Schipper (1988: VIII): “[…] Les mots pour ‘rituel’ s’inscrivent, selon les langues, dans des champs sémantiques souvent assez éloignés les uns des autres […]. On peut dire de façon générale que, même si les langues ne disposent pas de termes spécifiques, et même si la science ne fournit pas (encore) de définitions, nous *savons* ce que c’est que le rituel […]. L’étude du rituel doit toujours s’appuyer sur des exemples précis, provenant de l’observation d’un ensemble et de l’inventaire complet des éléments qui le constituent. La description analytique doit ici précéder la systématisation”.

[19] This point has already been noted regarding Tibet by Karmay (2005: 33): “A member of one community cannot participate in the propitiation of another community’s propitiatory ceremony to local deites”.

If they cannot go back to the village, their relatives try to send them offerings presented that day.

- The ritual is economically sponsored by the community. The modalities differ slightly according to the region. There can be main sponsors to the rituals, households called 'hosts' (*gnas po*) who take turns yearly in providing the bulk of the offerings, it can be a general contribution in kind shared by the whole community, or a combination of both, but the main point here is that the ritual cannot be sponsored by an outsider.

  The offerings are made in kind and therefore tend to reflect the ecological system of the area. The only item which comes from outside is meat, often now bought in town after the animal sacrifices became frowned upon in the 1980s. Traditionally, while the highlands areas would use barley or wheat to prepare the offering cakes (*gtor ma* and *tshogs*), the lowlands with their rich subtropical flora would have rice, millet or corn (maize) and forest products such as banana leaves or stems and wild tubers. Locally brewed alcohol, cheese, butter and whey are always presented, irrespective of the area.

- These rituals are always performed in an open space, and not in a temple. A makeshift altar is erected for the occasion at a place which is a common ground (a forest clearing, meadow, pasture, or rocky mountain), or which has a natural feature considered as the soul (*bla*) of the deity such as a stone, a rock, or a lake.

- During these rituals one main deity is invoked, but also all the deities who live in the landscape on the territory of the community as well as household deities such as *thabs lha*, *sgo lha*, *gung lha*.

  The main deity is generally the *yul lha*, or *pho lha*, also called *gnas po*/*gnasp* in Bhutan.[20] In its multi-faceted role, on this occasion the deity is propitiated more particularly as the *nor lha*, which is the god of the cattle (*nor*) in Bhutan. Cattle are still a symbol of wealth in rural Bhutan and its prosperity is very much linked to the community prosperity. Cattle and other animals are on this occasion dedicated to the deity.

  The deity is cajoled into coming to the community by offerings and songs. Sometimes the practitioner makes a mental trip to its abode through a recitation or physically goes to the mountain to welcome it. The deity sometimes comes down to the village by a ladder or by ropes, reminding us of the divine *dmu* rope through which, in pre-Buddhist Tibet, gods and kings came from the sky.[21]

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[20] On this terminology issue, see Pommaret 1996 & 2004 and Ura 2004.
[21] Karmay 1986 *et al.*

The outdoor space and altar where it resides during the ritual is ornamented with flowers, leaves, and ritual offerings as well as often with dough effigies or stones representing the cattle. Fumigations (*bsangs*) play an important part in the propitiation. The farewell and sending off of the deity is also considered an important moment at the end of the ritual and must be performed correctly so that the deity does not get upset at the last minute with the villagers.

Among all the deities, one which is important for the Bumthang and Kheng regions is worth mentioning here. His name is Ode Gungjel and he has to be invited from Bsam yas in Central Tibet. This deity is probably the Tibetan god ’O de gung rgyal and its cult in south central Bhutan may reveal a population migration during the imperial period. A study of the place that ’O de gung rgyal occupies in Bhutanese myths and rituals still remains to be done but will probably give us clues about the ancient history of Bhutan.[22]

- These rituals are a grand occasion for the community to socialise and rejoice together with a purpose: their merry-making will please the deities who in turn will bring prosperity on to them. Everybody shares home-made food and alcohol, dances, and plays games, especially tug-of-war and archery, which is well known to be connected with local deities. There is no gender bias in the celebrations, except for archery which is a male domain; at archery games, women act as cheer-leaders, shouting abuses and praises to the archers.

- One of the characteristics of these rituals that still reinforces their community base is that each of them, in one form or another, involves a procession or a visit to each household by the practitioner usually accompanied by other villagers. Songs and dances to please the house deities and to bring prosperity are performed in each house and the family offers the visitors snacks and alcohol.

[22] ’O de gung rgyal is a very important deity of the pre-Buddhist religion which is mentioned in Dunhuang manuscripts as early as the 8th century. He is considered to be one of the four Sky deities, *phyva* brothers, and he came down from the sky to earth to be the father of all the mountain deities as well as the people. His abode is a mountain in ’Ol kha in Central Tibet, not far from Bsam yas. See among others, Tucci 1949: 728–33; Nebesky 1956: 208–209; Stein 1959: 83 n.226; Haarh 1969: passim; Macdonald 1971: 302; and Karmay 1998: passim. Gu se lang ling, one of his offspring according to Bhutanese records, is central in the myth of origin of the Ura rulers (Bumthang). See Aris 1979: 126–28. Also in Ura the celebration of *Gyag lha* in the 7th month is performed at the top of a mountain called ‘Pushey’ (personal communication 2006), also called Spu rgyal, another name known to be associated with the ancient Tibetan kings. Some scholars are now calling Spu rgyal the dynasty of the Tibetan kings.

- There is usually no ritual texts, besides the *gsol kha* or *gser skyems* and the transmission of the songs and invocations is done orally. Recently, however, Bhutanese researchers have been trying to note down some of these songs.

- The practitioners perform the litugical part, *gsol kha* or *gser skyems*, for the deities but also oversee and direct the whole chain of events that compose the ritual. They have different names according to the regions: *bon po, dpa' bo, dpa' mo, jo mo, snyal 'byorm, pha jo, phra min, lha mi*. Their function can be hereditary through family lineages, or it can be imposed on them after a sickness or a trance. However, during these local community rituals, no trance is involved and therefore I am not using the much-debated 'shaman' term. As mentioned earlier, the practitioners have a double religious identity. They perform the so called *Bon chos* local rituals as a service to the villagers. By doing so it does not contradict their being Buddhist.

- It is also the occasion for the divination (*mo* or *dpyad*, often pronounced *phya*[23]) for the annual community welfare. While divination for the villagers is usually done by a *Rtsis pa*, in this case it is performed by the practitioner and has different modalities according to the place: reading the cracks of the shoulder blade of a sheep, throwing banana leaves in the air, using threads, or pouring alcohol from a common cauldron.

- Many of these rituals also have a sexual component, which for the Bhutanese has several functions: avoiding malicious gossip (*mi kha*) in order to keep harmonious relationships in the community,[24] atoning one's misdeeds, and wishing fertility, especially to childless women.

  This component is materialised by ritual cakes and wooden sticks in the shape of phalluses called by the honorific term of *Spo [Pho?] chen rgyal ba blo gros*[25] as well as the exchange of obscene words and songs. Conversation taboos between family members are

[23] On divination and oracles, see Karmay 1998: 246–47.

[24] Kapstein translated a text from Humla in northwest Nepal attributed to Padmasambhava (1997: 529–37). In this interesting short text, the cause of malicious gossip is attributed to a girl from China: "Girl with black grimy, tangled hair, when you first arrived where did you come from? You came from the borders of Tibet and China, where malicious gossip afflicted the Chinese, so that the Chinese king sent you to Tibet".

The main purpose of the Kharamshing ritual in Eastern Bhutan (documented by ILCS) is to keep gossip and curses away from the house. Its sequences differ slightly from one place to the other (Pelgen 2000 & Galay 2004). Two texts are believed to be at the origin of the ritual, the *Mi kha dgra bgyur* and the *Mi kha'i gto bsgyur* (Pelgen 2000: 673).

[25] On this subject, see Tashi Tobgye 2006: 11–12.

> also broken during some rituals, and they are believed to remove all the 'shame' (Dzongkha: *Ngo tshao*) of the year. (No doubt that the abundant quantity of alcohol consumed by both sexes during these occasions helps to overcome the taboo!)

The double religious identity of the practitioners as well as the fact that these rituals are still so much alive in Bhutan stem from the authorisation, attributed to Padmasambhava, of performing these rituals in order to please the deities whom he had 'bound by oath'. Therefore the local community rituals called *Bon chos* in Bhutan provide an interesting insight on the complex process of the Buddhicisation of the Himalayas and how Buddhists negotiated a space for non-Buddhist practices.[26] It is well known that rituals are not static and evolve with time and influences, elements being added or modified. Thus, in Bhutan, the understanding that animal sacrifices should be avoided during local rituals came only in the 1980s with the strong influence of the 'correct practices' of Buddhism.[27]

Besides these, other local community rituals that contain sequences that are similar to *Bon chos* rituals also include Buddhist elements. They are considered Buddhist by the villagers and their practitioners belong to the Buddhist religious establishment. For example, in Laya (Gasa district), the local deities are propitiated, and at the same time there is a thanksgiving ceremony for the *Zhabs drung* Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594–1651) with offerings of the first harvest products that commemorates his arrival from Rva lung (Central Tibet) to Laya around 1616. In the eastern Bhutan region of Tong phu, during the Hungla ritual holy books are taken around the fields in a procession (*chos skor*) which lasts two days. In Stang O rgyan chos gling (Bumthang district), the *bskang gso* said to have been introduced by Rdo rje gling pa (1346–1405) is a grand ritual for the *chos srung* Mgon po ma ning[28] performed by monks and lay-practitioners. But it also contains many of the features of a local community festival including non-Buddhist elements with propitiation of all the local

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[26] Without intending a definite statement on the antiquity of these practices in Bhutan, I would nevertheless quote Karmay (1998: 290): "[…] the early system of beliefs [that] not only have survived or been adapted to the local situation within a predominantly Buddhist culture but still remains strong as agents of social and religious organisation, particularly among the populations of Tibetan culture where the ties to the traditional society have not yet disintegrated".

[27] On this subject, see also Samuel 2005: 204–207.

[28] In order not to contribute to the confusion, I will not use the name Mahākāla in this article.

deities of the territory as well as participation restricted to the villagers.[29] Still in Stang, the ritual called *rab gnas* at Nam mkha' lha khang commemorates the foundation of the temple and propitiates the *chos srung* Mgon po and Lhamo, known in Bumthangkha as Gadpo and Gadmo, 'old man' and 'old woman'. However, it takes place in the temple as well as in the open air and is sponsored by the community. One of its main elements is a yak mannequin who performs a dance and blesses the villagers. It represents the local deity *gter bdag* Rin chen dgon g.yag, important for this community as a *nor lha*. The last example here would be from Kheng Bu li and Go ling (Zhemgang district). In these villages, the non-Buddhist and Buddhist rituals are performed side-by-side on the same date. Buddhist lay practitioners and monks conduct a ceremony in the temple while the community ritual is taking place and people attend both.[30]

CONCLUSION

From the few examples presented here, we could conclude that in Bhutan if non-Buddhist rituals have survived with distinctive features including their practitioners and the worship of a common local deity, there are also other local community rituals which are 'multi-layered'. They reveal the complexity of Buddhist practices[31] especially regarding the *chos srung* as well as the different levels of understanding about them by the members of the lay community. Some *chos srung* like Ye shes mgon po are deities 'beyond the world' (*'jig rten las 'das pa*) and therefore can be an 'object of refuge' (*skyabs yul*) sought only for spiritual improvement and finally to attain Enlightenment. On the other hand, several *chos srung* including certain forms of Mgon po are regarded as *'jig rten pa,* 'those who are within this world'. They are in the same category as local deities, and are therefore propitiated in order to obtain prosperity in this life.[32]

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[29] Pommaret 2006.

[30] Pommaret 2004 & Dorji, Lham 2004.

[31] On the different possibilities of amalgamation in Tibetan Buddhism, I refer the reader to the brilliant article of Mayer and Cantwell entitled "Why did the Phurpa tradition become so prominent in Tibet ?", IATS Bonn, 2006 (unpublished).

[32] Karmay 2005: 35. In Bhutan famous examples are the 'The Raven-headed Mahākāla of action' (Las mgon bya rog gdong can) and Mgon po Byang bdud who are a pair of 'warrior gods' first associated with the protection of 'Jigs med rnam rgyal, the father of the first king. The Bhutanese historian Lam Pemala writes that, along with other local deities, they came to protect the first king: *De nas Bum thang Sde bzhi'i yul lha Skyes bu lung btsan dang Mang sde lung pa'i yul lha gtso bo Mug*

Rituals like *bskang gso* or *mdos*, which do not belong to the Indian Buddhist corpus, are examples of this type of propitiation.

A community may therefore pray for prosperity to a *chos srung* who, in the literate Buddhist sense, should not be addressed with such a request. This worship cannot be dismissed simply because it does not follow the orthodox textual practice.[33] Field examples from Bhutan, at least, show the extent to which the *chos srung* figures and the local deities have been amalgamated in local community rituals. Mgon po and Lha mo in Stang *rab gnas* are for the villagers equivalent to the ancient Gadpo and Gadmo; during the *bskang gso* ritual in O rgyan chos gling the cult of Mgon po ma ning is accompanied with the worship of all the local deities for prosperity. Yar tsha pa, the local deity and *nor lha* of the people of Toebesa (Stod sbi sa) in western Bhutan is worshipped for prosperity along with Mgon po during the *mchod pa* of the Hongtsho village near Thimphu.

These local community rituals as well as the cult of the *chos srung* figures in fact represent quite accurately the flexibility of Buddhism as it spread and grew in this region, assimilating and incorporating, with the desire of managing two different sets of beliefs and two quite antagonistic ideologies: one aimed at prosperity and happiness in this life and the other turned towards non-attachment and betterment for the next life.[34] Bhutanese villagers articulate this dichotomy in their discourse: if they have to improve their way of life, they have to work; therefore following the Buddhist moral precepts is impossible. Only monks are given a chance.[35] In their daily life, they have to worship the deities who can bring them prosperity. This tends to echo Ortner's conclusion on the Sherpa religious life:

> There is, then an *a priori* logic to the argument that Buddhism, given its premises, will be antagonistic to social life and will thus be problematic for lay people operating in religion's shadow.[36]

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btsan lhag par las Mgon Bya rog gdong can dang Mgon po Byang bdud dgra lha rnams zhus te/ (Lam Pemala 1994: 521). See also Lam Pemala 1994: 559–62.

[33] On this, I would like to enlist the support of Karmay (1998: 289–90) who wrote: "Rituals cannot be understood unless they are considered within the context of the social situation in which or for which they are executed. Ritual beliefs and practices reflect social structure and bind social relations".

[34] On this subject see Imaeda 1988 and Imaeda 2008 forthcoming.

[35] Interestingly, the villagers' view on religion echoes the divide between Buddhologists and anthropologists described by Samuel 2005: 4–5.

[36] Ortner quoted by Holmberg 1989: 231.

Paul also remarked on the Sherpa 'existential paradox':

> A salvation religion in a routinized social context must at the same time affirm and deny the value of life in the social world. It must, therefore contain some practices designed to 'save' the individual from an intolerable life in this world and others designed to lengthen, enhance and bestow riches and health on the same existence in this world.[37]

The Buddhicisation process and tensions that it creates are not unique to Bhutan. Holmberg for the Tamang, Ortner for the Sherpa, Gellner for the Newar, and Tambiah in northern Thailand, among others, have described and analysed it based on their field studies. Each region seems to have developed its modalities for a dialogue, peaceful or conflictual, and negotiations which depend on socio-historical factors are in constant transformation. However, Ortner's conclusions that Buddhism has a tendency to "isolate and atomize the individual and devaluate social bondings and social reciprocity" cannot be applied to the Bhutanese religious life. As we saw from the examples above, if the Bhutanese villagers reflect an 'existential paradox', they appear to have dealt with the issue of practices in a different manner, closer to what Holmberg writes for the Tamang: "in both word and practice Tamang accommodate multiplicity without final privileges".[38]

This note on the rituals does not pretend to survey the whole religious spectrum of rituals in Bhutan, or to present a definite study of an immensely complex corpus of rituals. It is simply an attempt to reflect upon local community rituals as they are perceived by the villagers and to raise, in this specific context, the issue of Buddhicisation in the operating modalities of Bhutanese religious life.

In Bhutan, all the local community rituals with their multiple religious identities present common characteristics that reflect a local identity and they continue to be territorial markers even in the modern context of Bhutan's nation building and administrative reorganisation. As such, they relate to rituals performed throughout the Himalayas and in the Tibetan culture as defined by Karmay in the following manner:

> [Their] propitiation is concerned only with mundane affairs, that is man's desire to have prosperity, fame, power, wealth, glory, victory and all the worldly sublimity which the layman believes the local deity has the power to bestow upon him. The belief that one needs the protection

[37] Paul 1979: 274.
[38] Holmberg 1989: 229.

of the *yul lha* deity is autochthonous and there is no spiritual motivation".[39]

However, because of the socio-religious development specific to Bhutan, some of their modalities are particular. Recent studies and fieldwork have shown that all over the Himalayas and the Tibetan world, there is no ideal template for local community rituals, only common elements.

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[39] Karmay 2005: 33.

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ANNEX

SHORT DESCRIPTIONS OF THE RITUALS DOCUMENTED BY THE AUDIO-VISUAL UNIT OF ILCS (2003–2004), ROYAL UNIVERSITY OF BHUTAN, UNESCO INTANGIBLE HERITAGE PROJECT

The short descriptions of the rituals are meant for a Bhutanese general audience, mainly the BBS (Bhutan Broadcasting Service) and not for academics. However, in the context of this paper given the fact that the rituals of Bhutan are so little known, we thought it would be useful to include them as an annex. The work on these rituals is still in process with the ILCS lecturers and Jamyang Tenzin, ILCS chief cameraman and editor assisted by Yannick Jooris and myself. Even if it is not flawless, the already existing documentation forms a valuable resource for researchers and the work done provides a unique overview of the local rituals in a well-defined historical and geographical context.

YEAR 2003

GAZANG GUNGLHA

Project # 0001–0703

Western Calendar:	13/07/2003
Bhutanese calendar:	15/05 Water female sheep year
Language:	Tshangla/Sharchopkha
Location :	Bainangzor (Phegpari, Trashigang district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal (60 minutes)
Number of tapes:	4 hours recorded
Number of interviews:	2

Brief ritual description:

Gazang Gunglha is the name of a local deity which is believed to reside on the roof of the house (*gung*). This ritual is a *Bon* (non Buddhist) ritual. The *phrami* (local practitioner) becomes possessed by the deity 'Gazang Gungla' and through its spiritual power the *phrami* performs the ritual to cure the sick person. In this case, the sick person had an eye problem.

GAKHA DOKHA
Project # 0002–0703

Western Calendar:	13/07/2003
Bhutanese calendar:	15/05 Water female sheep year
Language:	Tshangla/Sharchopkha
Location:	Bephu (Wamrong, Trashigang district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	5 hours recorded
Number of interviews:	4

Brief ritual description:

Gakha Dokha is a ritual belonging to the ancient *Bon* practice called *Bon chos* in Bhutan. It is also directed towards freeing people from illness and other spiritual possessions. '*Gakha*' literally means the upper deity, which in this case is Tshongtshongma (the mother spirit) and '*Dokha*' means the lower deity, Memi Pangzampa (the father spirit). This ritual is therefore, dedicated to the two main deities of the eastern region who often cause sickness to both man and cattle if people tend to neglect them. When people suffer from severe headaches, muscle pains, and body aches, if medicine does not cure them, people believe that this ailment is sent forth by the father and mother spirits. Therefore, the *Gakha Dokha* ritual is commissioned.

The process of the ritual begins with a vast display of offering items and varieties of colourful dresses hung on a frame tied to four poles erected in a 'c' shape. When all the preparations are completed,

the *phrami* (the name of a certain class of practitioners close to the *pawo/pamo*) begins his ritual by inviting Tshongtshongma from the northern mountains. She is verbally invited and guided along the path till the place where the ritual takes place. Once the deity reaches the spot the *phrami* makes the offerings to her. Then he goes on to invite Memi Pangzampa by following the same procedure. After the offering recitation is over he takes the deities back to their citadels along the same path through which they were brought. The narration of the names of places including prominent mountains, rivers and valleys appears in the wordings of the ritual. Like *Pamo,* this ritual is not based on a written text. Therefore, the wordings differ from place to place and person to person.

KARAMSHING

Project # 0003–0703

Western Calendar:	13/07/2003
Bhutanese calendar:	15/05 Water female sheep year
Language:	Tshangla/Sharchopkha
Location :	Bephu (Wamrong, Trashigang district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	3 hours recorded
Number of interviews:	1

Brief ritual description:

Kharamshing is a ritual against a curse as well as the name of a particular wooden structure characterised by a phallus erected through this ritual. It is typical of Eastern Bhutan but performed slightly differently from place to place. It is believed to be a *Bon* ritual that survived with many other ancient beliefs and practices. It is performed to protect against a curse that arose from an original act of incest.

A man preferably born in the tiger year or, if not, born in the snake year of the Bhutanese calendar, is designated to make the *Kharamshing*. It is believed that people born these years are innately arrogant and fierce even in the subtlest sense and thus make the *Kharamshing* more effective. This ritual requires that many household items are attached on a wooden frame, also called *kharamshing*, which is entirely made from a local tree known as *robtang shing* (Lat. *Rhus chiensis*, Anacardiaceae family). A bow and arrow, a big phallus, a *bangchung* (a small bamboo basket), a wooden ladle, a bamboo strainer, a small piece of cloth containing nine varieties of grains tied at the mouth of the phallus by nine different strings, and a garland of egg shells are placed on the wooden frame. They represent the food and essential items to be given to the *kharam* (curse and ill-luck). A cup made of hardened ash which acts as a lid or an antidote to the evil force is put in another cloth, and an egg which represents the heart of the evil force is placed in the middle of the structure as well as four thin sticks which represent the family members. The upper wooden structure is then encircled with nine varieties of strings in a spider web shape, and finally a garland of empty eggshells is also hung.

The *kharamshing* is then usually placed outside the house near the fields and the family offers scarves, money and food to it. The ritual practitioner, usually the so-called *bon po* (it can be anybody who knows the incantation), begins by throwing grains at the *kharamshing* and sings the following words:

> May the family be spared from the curses from the North
> May the family be spared from the curses from the South
> May the family be spared from the curses from the East
> May the family be spared from the curses from the West
> May the family be spared from bad people and jealousy
> May the family be spared from poisoned food and water
> May the family be spared from evil curses
> May the house be spared from curses
> May the cattle be spared from curses!

At the same time the family members toss mixture of nine different grains as a gesture of their participation to drive away evils and illnesses and men take turns hitting the central egg, symbolising the curse, with arrows. The ritual concludes with a good meal for the performer shared by the family and their neighbours.

2 minutes. DV CAM, Bhutan 2003

PAMO
Project # 0004–0703

Western Calendar:	14/07/2003
Bhutanese calendar:	16/05 Water female sheep year
Language:	Tshangla/Sharchopkha
Location:	Bephu (Wamrong, Trashigang district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	13 hours recorded
Number of interviews:	4

Brief ritual description:

In this case the term *Pamo* (*dpa' mo*) refers to both the ritual as well as the performer. It is always performed by a woman, hence the term '*pamo*' denotes a female entity.

This ritual, which is directed towards good luck and health, has no written transmission. It has been passed down orally. Normally one of the daughters inherits this practice from her mother. It is said that the deity spiritually designates who should be the future practice holder from amongst the daughters and then it is automatically passed down to her.

The ritual, performed in a house at the request of a family, is a strenuous endeavour as it consists of six hours of continuous dance and recitation during which the *Pamo* remains spiritually possessed by the deity. She sits on a carpet of banana leaves on which a swastika has been designed with rice grains and covered with a cloth. Despite the vigorous movements of the *pamo* on the mat right throughout the entire ritual, the swastika should remain undisturbed, symbolising the prosperity of the host family. Should the design be distorted, it would be considered as a bad omen for the host family. The *pamo* performs divination; she identifies the causes of the family problems and suggests remedies to the extent possible.

The *pamo* conducts three main ceremonies:

- The first is called *Khandro Dalam*. This part of the ritual is directed towards restoring and revitalising the life force of the host family threatened by evil spirits.

- The second is the *Choesung Tangra*. It is directed towards repelling evil influences and restoring good health and luck by pleasing the local deities through offerings. This part of the ritual concludes by making a thanksgiving offering to the deity. These two ceremonies are performed at the request of a particular family.

- The third is the *Shakpa (shags pa).* It is a thanksgiving and atonement ceremony performed by the *pamo* for the deities that she reveres and invokes during her rituals. This ritual can be performed either as part of the above two ceremonies or it can be performed independently on an annual basis as a thanksgiving ritual symbolising her gratitude to the deities for all the spiritual power and support rendered during the past one year and for future supports as well.

3 minutes, DV CAM, Bhutan 2003

JACHUNG MICHUNG

Project # 0005–0703

Western Calendar:	18/07/2003
Bhutanese calendar:	20/05 Water female sheep year
Language:	Bumthangkha
Location:	Buli goempa, Chumey (Bumthang district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	9 hours recorded
Number of interviews:	5

Brief ritual description:

Jachung Michung is a very unusual religious dance which is performed only in two places in Bumthang, one of them being Buli

and the other Jampa Lhakhang. It is a mask dance performed in the style of a theater performance and said to be a 'treasure' revealed by the great saint Dorje Lingpa (14th century AD). The purpose of the dance is to chase away evil spirits and establish harmony and peace in the community and family. This dance is performed once every two years to commemorate victory over evils. The performers are *gomchen* (lay religious practitioners) common in this part of Bhutan.

The main characters in the dance are a *michung* ('small man') who is considered as the son of the god Jajin (Indra) and a *jachung* (Garuda, mythical bird). The dance is based on the well-known folk story of a princess who lost her way from China to Tibet where she was to marry the king. One day, the king of the gods, Jajin, happened to meet the wandering princess in the forest and they had a relation resulting in the birth of a son. However, since the princess was determined to marry the king of Tibet, she left the child all by himself in the forest. Two *jachungs* spotted the child (*michung*) and attacked him. But fortunately Jajin, who was the biological father, had foresight about this incident. He came to the child's rescue and drove away the *jachungs*, thus saving his son's life.

The dance as it is really performed at Buli represents the child as having a whole human family including siblings, who try their best to save him from the *jachungs*. One of the most important episodes is when women who desire to have a child are blessed with sacrificial cakes in the form of phalluses. It is said that this ritual is a blessing for childless parents in order to conceive.

2 minutes, DV CAM, Bhutan 2003
13 minutes, DV CAM, Bhutan 2003, BBS

HUNGLA SANYEN

Project # 0006–0803

Western Calendar:	22/08/2003 to 28/08/03
Bhutanese calendar:	25/06 to 30/06 Water female sheep year
Language:	Kurtoepekha (Bumthangkha dialect)
Location :	Togkhaphu (Trashiyantse district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes

Number of tapes: 13 hours recorded

Number of interviews: 9

Brief ritual description:

Hungla is a community based annual ritual performed by monks and lay practitioners involving womenfolk, who play an important part. A very important part of the ritual is a symbolic fire fight to drive away natural calamities, illness, famine and other possible disasters. Oral history reveals that this ritual was performed when a serious outbreak of famine and diseases engulfed the community, whenever and wherever it was required. But gradually it became an annual event.

This part of the ritual is performed at night and is very spectacular. A fire fight between two agreed groups of different hamlets in the community takes place. The villagers toss finely powdered bark and decayed wood over a burning torch and direct the ensuing flame towards the opponent. This is a symbol of burning out all bad effects and driving away evil spirits from one's hamlet towards the opponent's. When the fire fight concludes, the two sides unite to symbolically mark the harmony of the community. Then they together visit the houses with their torches producing soaring flames to drive away evil spirits from each house.

The next morning after the fire fight, monks and lay practitioners holding musical instruments lead a long procession, followed by women carrying volumes of Buddhist scriptures. They circumambulate all the fields belonging to the community as a symbol of blessing the entire area. This procession, called *choekhor*, takes two days to make the full round and finally arrives at the community temple where the ritual ends with a grand feast.

Today the people of Tokhapung still strongly believe that this ritual brings good harvest and congenial climatic conditions. It diminishes all kinds of natural damage such as soil erosion, hailstorm, etc. On the other hand, if the ritual is neglected, it is believed to cause natural calamities such as epidemics and diseases, bad climate, encroachment of wild animals into fields and much more.

Though it is a ritual patronised by the community, its attendance is declining, which is an indication of the younger generation's urban migration. More and more children go to school leaving the village life to their parents. Therefore, the gap between the new and old

generation tends to widen especially when the urbanised younger generation feels that those rituals are no longer a part of their world.

7 minutes, DV CAM, Bhutan 2003
16 minutes, DV CAM, Bhutan 2003, BBS

PHENDEY CHOEP
Project # 0007–0903

Western Calendar:	08/09/2003 to 09/09/03
Bhutanese calendar:	13/08 to 14/08 Water female sheep year
Language:	Dzongkha
Location :	Hongtsho (Thimphu district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	11 hours recorded
Number of interviews:	9

Brief ritual description:

Phendey Choep is a ritual with a unique mask dance dedicated to the mountain deity Yartshapa, who is the local deity of the people of the area of Toep Phendey, widely known as Toebesa, a community under Thimphu district.

Hongtso was once a summer place for the people of Teop Phendey located on the other side of the Dochula mountain pass from Thimphu valley. Today these people reside all the year round in Toebesa and Hongtsho is no longer used as a summer place as it used to be. However the legacy of worshiping Yartshapa, which has been passed down for generations, brings them back to Hongtsho on the other side of the mountain just for this day.

Today this dance is performed by men from just eleven households. In the past as well it was customary for these eleven households to conduct this dance. The exact number of people required for the dance is uncertain and depends on the availability of men from these houses. Therefore, the number of dancers varies every year and there is every

possibility of losing this dance owing to the dwindling number of dancers.

The dancers are required to reach the Hongtsho temple the day before the ritual and to spend the night in the temple without mixing with other people not participating in the dance. This is to maintain the sanctity of their body and mind. Early in the morning, the next day they go up to the mountain ridge to receive the mountain deity Yartshapa and take him to the temple. One of the dancers dresses up in the costume of Yartshapa and represents the deity; he is escorted in a religious procession of music and song. Upon his arrival at the temple, the Yartshapa dance begins.

After the mask dance, the masks are locked with a seal in a closet for the rest of the year and the closet is not opened again until it is time again the next year.

LHABON
Project # 0008–1203

Western Calendar:	06/12/2003 to 08/12/03
Bhutanese calendar:	13/10 to 15/10 Water female sheep year
Language:	Tshangkap and partially choeke
Location :	Tshangkha (Trongsa district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	11 hours recorded
Number of interviews:	8

Brief ritual description:

The *Lhabon* (or *Lha Boe* ‘calling the gods’) is a three-day annual event for the people of Tshangkha, Trongsa District. It is apparently an ancient *Bon* practice which was incorporated into Buddhism. Therefore, some Buddhist elements can also be noticed in it. The *Lhabon* is basically a ritual performed in order to dispel evil and misfortunes and to receive blessings from the local deities in order to establish peace, harmony and good harvest for the entire community.

The deities are formally received from their abodes in the mountains by a procession of dancing and singing villagers headed by the ritual master. Meanwhile other villagers construct the temporary altar, which is designated as the abode of the deities in the community during the three days. The ritual begins when the deities are brought to their newly constructed abode. At the end of the ritual, the deities are taken back to their mountains abodes.

One of the specificities of the *Lhabon* that stands in contrast with the other rituals is that all preparations including the ritual cakes, the banners, and the erection of the temporary altar have to be completed on the same day. Advanced preparation as done in other rituals is forbidden. Therefore, people remain busy right from early dawn to dusk in order to meet the deadline.

As a symbol of receiving blessing from the deities, each household is visited by a procession headed by the main 'hosts' (normally two on a rotational basis) of the ritual. The house owners welcome the procession with plenty of alcohol, tea and snacks. To mark the successful ending of the ritual, women entertain the audience with songs while men perform the 'Drum dance', which is believed to have been introduced by Guru Rinpoche to his followers before he departed to his paradise.

23 minutes, DV CAM, Bhutan 2003 BBS

YEAR 2004

MONPAI NETANG
Project # 0009–0204

Western Calendar:	06/12/2003 to 08/12/03
Bhutanese calendar:	13/10 to 15/10 Wood monkey year
Language:	Mon Kha
Location :	Mon yuel (Trongsa district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	7 hours recorded

Number of interviews: 5

Brief ritual description:

Monpa is a name of a community under Trongsa district.

The focus of the field trip was the New Year celebration in that community which has a unique celebration in Bhutan that corresponds to the agricultural New Year of the 10th Lunar month. In this area, they use only a wild potatoes dish and *bangchang* (local wine) to celebrate. It is also a special place for its bamboo basket making, popular all over Bhutan. We have been recording the whole process but no analysis of the ritual has been done yet for lack of time and resources.

ASHI (Alce) LHAMO

Project # 0010–0804

Western Calendar: 21/08/2004 to 24/08/2004
Bhutanese calendar: 7/07 to 10/07 Wood monkey year

Language: Bumthangkha, Ura dialect

Location : Ura (Bumthang district)

Shooting format: Mini DV Pal 60 minutes

Number of tapes: 14 hours recorded

Number of interviews: 3

Brief ritual description:

Ashi means ‘older sister’ and Lhamo means ‘Goddess’.

This ritual is unique in Bhutan because it is performed only by women in Ura, Bumthang district. It is a 3-day ritual to please all their local deities and get blessings for good weather and harvesting. A group of village women will have to climb in the early morning to the summit of the mountain overlooking Ura to dance and invite the deities to come to the monastery for the 3-day celebration.

We have been recording the whole process but no analysis of the ritual has been done yet for lack of time and resources.

KHARPU
Project # 0011–1004

Western Calendar:	27/10/2004 to 31/10 2004
Bhutanese calendar:	14/09 to 18/09 Wood monkey year
Language:	Khengkha and partly Choekye
Location :	Shingkhar (Zhemgang district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	15 hours recorded
Number of interviews:	16

Brief ritual description:

Kharpu is apparently an ancient *Bon* practice which has survived in remote areas of Bhutan. It is celebrated with some variations all over the historical Kheng region, which today is divided between the Zhemgang and Mongar districts. This particular *Kharpu* has been documented in the Kheng Shingkhar community.

It is a ritual performed in order to dispel evil and misfortunes and receive blessings from the deity Oede Gungyel in order to have peace, harmony and good harvest for the entire community. The ritual is preceded by an elaborate purification process after which the main practitioner, called the *bon po*, visualises a journey to Tibet to invite the deity to come from Central Tibet via the Monla Karchung pass and Bumthang through an invocation. The deity’s seat in the village is a stone adorned by flags for the occasion.

The ritual has several parts. The most important is the offering to the deity for the well-being of the cattle in the community. Villagers bring rice, butter, and cheese as offerings, as well as small stones that represent the cattle which are tied to the makeshift altar. The *bon po* and his assistants sing *A Hoi,* and make the offerings. He then does the divination with banana leaves and gives names to the stones which represent the cattle. People then take them back to their houses as blessings. That night, the *bon po*, accompanied by youngsters singing *A Hoi,* visits each household to propitiate all the houses.

Another part of the ritual takes place the next day at the stone where the deity resides. Each household brings rice and local wine, which is put into a common caldron. They are offered to the deity and then shared among all the villagers. Divination is done by pouring alcohol contributed by all the villagers from a big pot along the footpath that runs through the village. As a sign of prosperity for the coming year, the liquid must reach a certain point of the road. After nightfall, the *bon po* buries the head of a rooster, signifying the burying of evil spirits, in order to avert the possibility of untimely obstacles to the houses, cattle, land, people and wealth.

Toward the end of the celebration the villagers visit the lama (Buddhist master) and the village astrologer to offer them food and alcohol and to get their blessings. Finally, the *bon po* conducts a ceremony to send the deity back to Tibet via the same route through Bumthang and the Monla Karchung pass.

25 minutes, DV Cam , Bhutan 2004 BBS

TANG NAMKHA LHAKHANG RABNEY
Project 0012–1104

Western Calendar:	20/11/2004 to 22/11/04
Bhutanese calendar:	09/10 to 11/10 Wood monkey year
Language:	Bumthangkha, Tang dialect
Location :	Namkha Lhakhang, Tang valley (Bumthang district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	9 hours recorded
Number of interviews:	5

Brief ritual description:

This three-day annual ritual commemorates the founding of Namkha lhakhang by Lama Namkha Samdrup, hence the name *rabney* (consecration ritual). It is also performed for the peace and prosperity of the upper Tang valley villages who are the sponsors of this ritual. The Tibetan Lama Namkha Sumdrup came to Tang after founding

Ngang lhakhang in the upper Choekhor valley of Bumthang in the 16th century. While performing the consecration of this temple, he saw the Tang local deity Rinchen Gonyak, who is also the cattle deity, coming as a yak and dancing in the courtyard accompanied by Gonmo (Lhamo) and Gonpo (male deity), the two great protector deities.

Based on this, Lama Namkha Samdrup instigated the annual event where all the villagers contribute to pleasing the deities. The lama from Thowadra monastery in Tang leads the ritual, Thowadra being the residence of the local deity. The first day is dedicated to preparation. On the second day women perform folk dances in the temple after the prayers are over. In the meantime, men dressed as warriors (*pazaps*), go in a long procession up to Ogyenchoeling manor to invite the *choeje* (lord) to the ceremony. On their way back, they are received by the women.

The highlights of the festival are the dances of Gonpo, Gonmo (Lhamo), and Rinchen Gonyak. These three deities are personified by huge masks animated by people. The yak, also simply called Dawala by the villagers, is very popular and is considered to be a source of blessing through the clanging of its articulated jaws.

Offering rice cakes (*tshogs*) to the guests is a very important part of the ritual. The guests reciprocate with money. Finally money is also offered to the deities with auspicious words of aspirations. The last day is a repetition of the 2nd day, minus the procession to Ogyenchoeling.

24 minutes, DV CAM, Bhutan 2006 BBS

LAYA AOLEY
Project 0013–1204

Western Calendar:	06/12/2004 to 08/12/04
Bhutanese calendar:	15/09 to 17/09 Wood monkey year
Language:	Layakha & Dzongkha
Location :	Laya (Gasa district)
Shooting format:	Mini DV Pal 60 minutes
Number of tapes:	20
Number of interviews:	16

Brief ritual description:
This ritual takes place in the remote northern region of Laya (Gasa district). The people of Laya are yak pastoralists and they take great pride in the fact that the unifier of Bhutan, the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) stopped there on his way from Tibet to the central valleys of Bhutan. They welcomed him with barley offerings and he prayed for their abundant cattle and timely rain.

Every year, after the harvest, the Layaps commemorate this event and pray for continuous prosperity. On the 15th day of the 9th month, they bring a statue of the Zhabdrung out of Trashichoeling temple, to which each household contributes three measures of cereal as an offering. Fumigation offerings are made to the local deities, and men sing verses starting with '*Aoley, Aoley*', to which other men reply '*Legs so, legs so*'.

During the ritual, groups of men and young women visit the houses of the five Laya villages at night in turn and in a specific order. The men sing '*Aoley*' and dance in each household where they are offered ample drinks and snacks. This is considered a symbol of prosperity.

The young women, wrapped in black cloaks with their face covered, follow the men. It is said that it is a way for the Laya girls to find out the wealth of their prospective spouses incognito. Indeed Laya households proudly store their wealth in the form of rice bags and blankets along the walls. These visits last for three nights, and each morning, people go home and sleep.

Besides praying for prosperity, *Aoley* is a get-together ritual when all the community assemble and rejoice. Usually men spend most of the year traveling for trade.

23 minutes, DV CAM, Bhutan 2004 BBS

THE *ALA* AND *NGAKPA* PRIESTLY TRADITIONS OF NYEMO (CENTRAL TIBET): HYBRIDITY AND HIERARCHY

NICOLAS SIHLÉ

INTRODUCTION: THE LOCAL, HYBRID PRIESTLY TRADITION OF THE NYEMO *ALA*

The Larger Context

The relations between Buddhism and other, typically more localised, religious traditions have been a major focus of inquiry in the anthropology of Buddhism.[1] In Tibet, one may argue that a comparatively large part of the religious sphere has been transformed by Buddhist agents and subsumed within the Buddhist fold. (To be more precise, one should speak here of 'Buddhist or Bönpo [Bon po]': the Tibetan religion Bön [Bon], which in its early history evolved to become extremely similar to Tibetan Buddhism, has played in some areas an active part in the process outlined above.[2]) Thus a great many religious features of probably non-Buddhist origins—ritual acts or devices, notions of attributes of the person and their ritual maintenance, categories of spirits and deities, and to some extent even types of religious specialists, like mediums—have become part of shared, pan-Tibetan, Buddhist and Bönpo religious traditions. Some of these elements however, and in particular the cult of local place gods, remain at the core of many local, at the most only partially Buddhicised, and generally non-literate, traditions. These traditions are performed by the laity or, in certain areas, by ritual specialists called for instance *lhabön* [lha bon] or **aya*,[3] who typically show only

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[1] Some of the most notable contributions to this issue have been Obeyesekere 1963, Spiro 1978 [1967], 1982 [1970], Tambiah 1970, Gombrich 1971, Holmberg 1984, Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988 and Gellner 1990, 1997. On the Tibetan context, see Samuel 1993, Ortner 1995 and Sihlé 2006: 249–54.

[2] See for instance Ramble 1998: 139.

[3] The transliteration of a Tibetan term is given in square brackets at its first occurrence. Terms for which a standard spelling is unknown are marked with an

limited relations with the Buddhist or Bönpo clergy proper. These latter traditions, although localised in terms of the pantheon and sacred geography they address, often show continuities (in ritual forms, social organisation, etc.) within or even across Tibetan regions.

The present paper examines the case of a distinctively local and hybrid tradition of such priests: the **ala* of the southern, agricultural part of Nyemo [Snye mo] county, a small rural area in Central Tibet.[4] 'Hybridity', a term used to refer to a variety of cultural mixings and boundary crossings in contemporary social sciences,[5] refers here to the fact that these priests exhibit a constellation of core, defining features and activities that is quite atypical for Buddhist or Bönpo clergies, while appearing at the same time strongly integrated, sociologically and in other ways, with certain sectors of the Buddhist and Bönpo clergies. Thus we have at one end of the 'spectrum' (to use a linear metaphor for something more complex) an indigenised and hegemonic Buddhism (as well as a formally very similar minority tradition, Bön) and at the other end, other, at the most only partially Buddhicised traditions. In the present context, we find a hybrid tradition strongly associated with both of these poles. This is a complex (albeit approximate) picture, but an intellectually more satisfying one than the tired dichotomy of 'Buddhist' and 'non-Buddhist' traditions which some Tibetological scholarship, as well as more popular media, continue to refer to in all too simple a way. This paper aims at further refining this first formulation, by examining the relations between the Nyemo *ala* and a type of Buddhist and Bönpo religious specialist with which they are closely related: the *ngakpa* [*sngags pa*] or 'tantrists'[6], i.e., non-monastic, householder tantric priests who are typically

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asterisk. The phonetic transcription system adopted here is the THDL Simplified Phonetic Transcription of Standard Tibetan; see URL:
http://www.thdl.org/xml/showEssay.php?xml=/collections/langling/THDL_phonetics.xml&m=all

Finally, Chinese terms are indicated by 'Ch.' preceding the term in *pinyin*.

[4] Nyemo was traditionally considered part of the Central Tibetan province of Tsang [Gtsang] and is today included within the Lhasa [Lha sa] prefecture in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The present material derives from two and a half months of fieldwork carried out mainly in the agricultural areas of Nyemo between 2000 and 2002. My sincere thanks go to my fieldwork companion Drongbu Tsering Dorje and more generally to the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences (TASS) of Lhasa for their very valuable assistance. I am also particularly grateful to Fernand Meyer, who directed the collaborative (CNRS-TASS) Nyemo project within which this fieldwork took place, and to the UPR 299 (Milieux, sociétés et cultures en Himalaya) research unit of the CNRS which provided financial and logistical support for the fieldwork.

[5] See Kapchan and Strong 1999.

[6] See Stein 1987 [1962]: 65; Sihlé 2001.

recruited by succession from father to son.[7] In that sense, this paper is a modest contribution to both the anthropological study of the structure of the religious field in Buddhist contexts as well as to the still relatively underdeveloped anthropology of tantric Buddhism *per se*.[8]

Although the present article will not focus on this question, it is important to point out that the Nyemo *ala* (also called in some contexts *lhabön*, or even *aya-bönpo*) also seem to be related to other Tibetan types of priests, on the less Buddhist or Buddhicised side of things. The available linguistic and ethnographic evidence suggests very strongly that the Nyemo *ala* / *lhabön* categories are cognate to the *aya* / *lhabön* categories found in some other Tibetan and Himalayan areas.[9] The Nyemo and other cases share in particular a specialisation in more or less Buddhicised cults of local place gods. One observes however an uncommon set of features in the case of the Nyemo *ala*: in a nutshell, literacy, Bönpo religious affiliation, substantial relatedness with the *ngakpa* type, and of course the name *ala* in itself.

A Speculative Historical Hypothesis

The Nyemo *ala* tradition appears to be the result of processes of partial Buddhicisation (or in this case rather Bönicisation, which to some extent amounts to the same thing) of a more localised religious tradition. Although the lack of historical data makes this speculative, one might suggest that the Nyemo case could be the result of a process of (apparently local) fusion between an *aya* / *lhabön* type of tradition and a local Bönpo tradition, possibly of the *ngakpa* lineage type (or at least with some influence of the *ngakpa* model). One may further, but only very tentatively, suggest that this possible fusion of traditions may have been facilitated by common features shared by *aya* / *lhabön*

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7 Literally, *ngakpa* refers to a specialist of mantras, *ngak* [*sngags*]; however the term *ngak* also refers to tantric Buddhism as such, technically known as Sangngak Dorjé Tekpa [Gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa], the 'Adamantine Secret Mantra Path'. Some *sngags pa* include in their specialisation the practice of concise but powerful ritual acts focused on the application of certain mantras, but *ngakpa* in general specialise primarily (and more exclusively than their monastic counterparts) in larger, more complex tantric rituals, hence the designation 'tantrist'.

8 David Gellner's exploration of Newar Buddhism (Gellner 1992, 2001) is probably the most advanced contribution in this respect.

9 See Mumford 1989: 81–83; Diemberger 1992, 1996; and Ramble 1998, forthcoming.

traditions and *ngakpa* traditions: the importance of the hereditary lineage, and the (at least partial) specialisation in activities related to the interaction between human communities and their physico-divine environment. Finally, why this possible fusion would have developed only within the Bön tradition (all Nyemo *ala* are Bönpo, although most people in Nyemo are Buddhists) is a question for which I will suggest no answer; we will note only some affinities between the *ala* tradition and common Buddhist perceptions of Bön.

Due to the inescapably speculative nature of the previous hypotheses, I will leave them, and more generally all considerations of long-term diachrony, aside in the main discussion and focus on the contemporary *ala* tradition from a primarily synchronic angle.

The Relations Between ala *and* ngakpa *in Contemporary Nyemo*

From a synchronic perspective, my main argument will be that today, in actual Nyemo socioreligious *practices*, the category of *ala* priests as a whole (beyond the question of Bönpo vs. Buddhist religious affiliation) is hardly distinguishable from that of the *ngakpa*, whereas at the level of *representations*, some significant distinctions remain, at least in the perception of part of the Nyemo population. Globally, the picture is one of hybridity—with a substantial degree of indistinction between *ala* and *ngakpa*—but also, to some extent, of hierarchy, as the distinctions referred to in local discourses relate to value differentials in the Tibetan socioreligious field. There are also slight distinctions in register between the two terms *ala* and *ngakpa*.

More precisely, we will see that significant distinctions appear essentially at the levels of (actual or imputed) ritual specialisation and of religious identity. Most priests are called by only one of the two terms and never by the other, and these designations are transmitted patrilineally. One prominent priestly lineage in Zangri [Zangs ri / Bzang ri?] village[10] presents however a very particular case: the Zangri priests are called *ala* or *ngakpa* according to context. We will see that an important collective ritual, the Chökor [Chos skor], as well as other elements, show that in Zangri the two terms may work as designations, not of types of specialists, but of types of *functions*, possibly taken up sequentially by the same flesh-and-blood persons. This however is *not* the dominant use of the terms in Nyemo. Generally speaking, distinctions appear mostly in discourses that

[10] On the spelling, see Karmay 2000: 394 n. 6. The name is locally often pronounced Zangdri.

suggest differences in ritual specialisation between fixed *ala* and *ngakpa* types. In particular, the category of the *ala* retains, at least in local representations, strong primary associations with activities (cult of local place gods, fertility and purification rites) that, at least for some of them, are central features of *aya* / *lhabön* traditions.

At the level of the actual activities of Nyemo *ala* and *ngakpa* however, clear-cut distinctions cannot always be made. The *ala* share with the *ngakpa* a specialisation in a whole range (more or less extensive according to individual training) of very worldly domestic or collective village rituals. The *ala* tradition shows also a strong degree of integration within the interpersonal and institutional networks (particularly in terms of religious training) of the larger Bön tradition at the Nyemo level, and to some extent even beyond in Central Tibet. Finally, the integration between the *ala* and *ngakpa* categories is virtually complete at the sociological level of matrimonial relations between lineages.

Methodologically, this paper aims at analysing the relation between, and the patterns of use of, the Nyemo categories of *ngakpa* and *ala* from as broad as possible an array of angles: contextual linguistic usage, religious associations, colour and other symbolism, hierarchies of status and power, aspects of social organisation, etc. Note will be taken (and has already been made) of continuities with other Tibetan elements, but the analysis will privilege the objective of understanding the relevant local logics. The use of such a wide combination of perspectives is standard in anthropological practice, but perhaps still remains somewhat underdeveloped in the anthropology of Tibetan societies.

As a final note, if we accept the above-mentioned hypothesis that the contemporary situation is the result of a process of fusion between an *ala* / *lhabön* tradition and a local Bönpo tradition, then the preceding analysis would suggest that this fusion has been the most complete at the levels of actual religious practice and (even more so) training, as well as social group reproduction, whereas distinctions have remained most visible at the level of representations—as well as in one particular ritual, the Zangri Chökor.

THE CASE OF ZANGRI VILLAGE

In any one Nyemo village one finds generally no more than one *ala* or *ngakpa* lineage; in most, there is none.[11] During our investigations, we personally met three still practising *ala*, the same number of *ngakpa*, and gathered some information on a few more. Many people in Nyemo, when asked what distinguishes a *ngakpa* from an *ala*, are unable to suggest anything specific; many will say that there is no difference. However, a first, basic distinction, already mentioned, lies in the fact that whereas *ngakpa* may be either Buddhist or Bönpo, all *ala* are Bönpo. (This difference in religious affiliations may however be perceived by many as of limited relevance, given the very high degree of similarity in religious and social forms between Bön and Buddhism.) Nyemo as a whole is predominantly Buddhist, with only one Bönpo village, Zangri, as well as a few Bönpo *ala* in some Buddhist villages as well, many of whom were educated in part in Zangri.

These elements point to the importance of a closer examination of the Zangri case. Here we find a hereditary line of specialists called both *ngakpa* and *ala*.[12] This may be thought to be a situation in which more confusion than clarity can arise. In fact it is, somewhat paradoxically, the case in which distinctions between the two categories were expressed the most clearly. The major distinctions emerged however not so much from the conversations we had with the Zangri specialists (an uncle and his nephew), as from the *dual structure* of the main day of the Chökor ritual. I will describe here this particular ritual sequence as it was carried out in Zangri in the summer of 2002.[13] The Chökor (locally pronounced Chöngkur) belongs to a well-known category of collective rituals in which religious texts are carried around the entire cultivated land of a village, which is

[11] 'Lineage' is used here in the sense of a single family line, defined by patrilineal and generally direct descent (with succession from father to son), although one also finds cases of indirect descent (with succession from paternal uncle to nephew).

[12] We may note in passing that until the 1950s, there were three types of Bönpo non-monastic specialists in Zangri: besides the lineage of *ala* or *sngags pa*, there was (and still is) also a lineage of *lama* [*bla ma*] (of high religious and social status, very similar to the *sngags pa* described by Aziz 1978 for Dingri [Ding ri]), as well as a community of so-called *drawa* [*grwa pa*] (a term most commonly used for monks throughout Tibet, but also, in some areas, as in this case, for non-monastic religious specialists; see Sihlé 2001: 11), generally of very modest social and religious status. According to local oral tradition, this was formerly a monastic community, and it was reestablished as such after the Cultural Revolution.

[13] See the video on http://www.thdl.org/ (THDL Id. 2603).

considered to benefit the crops.[14] I will focus here primarily on the figure of the priest, but will also describe the ritual, as precise ethnographic accounts are still rare. It should be mentioned here that in a number of Nyemo villages, two similar collective rituals are performed: a Chökor and an Ongkor [’Ong skor], typically in the fifth and seventh months of the Tibetan lunar calendar (roughly, June / July and August / September). Both of these events typically involve a circumambulation of the fields and worship of place gods; the latter however has a more festive character and often includes horse races.[15]

In Zangri, the main day of the Chökor was preceded by a two day preliminary phase, often referred to as Chirim [Spyi rim] (often pronounced Chitrim; probably ‘Collective ritual’). This consisted in a reading of the Bum [’Bum], a classic (Buddhist or, here, Bönpo) text of the Perfection of Wisdom (Skt. Prajñāpāramitā) literature, followed by a ritual of propitiation of the protective deities, *sölka* [*gsol kha*]. The officiants—a few monks, accompanied by one knowledgeable, elderly former monk as well as by the main officiant of the Chökor, whom in the following description I shall call the ‘priest’—carried out these rituals together in one of several tents pitched in a small grove called *Sumgyeling, situated to the side of the village. In 2002, the officiant in the role of the ‘priest’ was a young man of twenty-five, who was holding this office for the first time: the previous priest, his paternal uncle, had died a few months before. Besides taking part in the monks’ ritual, the young priest also prepared the ritual implements he would need on the main day: a protective diagram, *sungkor* [*srung skor*], aiming especially at warding off hail, and a wooden ritual dagger wrapped in a small sheet of paper inscribed with mantras, and described to me as ‘the ritual dagger of the *ngakpa*’, *ngakpé purwa* [*sngags pa’i phur pa*]. This association of the *ngakpa* with warding off hail is in fact an important key to unpacking the Zangri Chökor and the duality of *ngakpa* and *ala* priestly roles.

On the morning of the third and main day, after a cup of tea at the monastery which overlooks the village, the priest set out to the ‘hail

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[14] See notably Fürer-Haimendorf 1964: 179–80, Jest 1975: 335–36, Mumford 1989: 98–99, Gutschow and Ramble 2003 and Riaboff 1997, with more complete bibliographical references.

[15] According to a particularly knowledgeable informant of Pusum [Phu gsum], the Chökor corresponds to the welcoming of the Kongpo Tenma Chunyi [Kong po brtan ma bcu gnyis], the ‘Twelve Tenma goddesses of Kongpo’ (a region in south-east Tibet), on their way northwards, and the Ongkor, to the seeing them off, or accompanying them, for their return.

cairn', *serto* [*ser tho*], a small construction made out of stone, consisting of a single, closed chamber, that was situated higher up on that mountainside. This was the beginning of the first phase of the day's ritual sequence, a phase called *serto tsuk* [*ser tho btsugs*], literally 'setting up the hail cairn'. With the help of a villager, the priest opened the side of the *serto*, introduced the protective diagram and the ritual dagger into the chamber, and then closed the *serto* again. Sitting next to the *serto* and overlooking the Zangri monastery, the village and its fields, he then carried out a short propitiation ritual addressed to all the worldly deities and spirits, and specifically those of Zangri.

When setting out towards the *serto*, the priest informed me that after coming back down, he would 'put on (a / the?) robe', *chupa* [*phyu pa*]; then the *chökor*—meaning, the *chökor* phase proper, the circumambulation (*kor*) of the village with the religious texts (*chö*)—would begin. His first comment was initially puzzling, as he was already wearing a *chupa*; but its meaning was clarified after our return from the *serto*, when he donned *the* robe: a special white *chupa*, worn especially for the *chökor*. In and around Zangri, the white *chupa* is a prescribed, well-known, exclusive and marked feature of the Chökor, the Ongkor, and more precisely the *ala*'s role in these rituals, whereas the robe worn for the first phase (which was of a rather standard grey cloth) was a non-specific and unmarked feature of that phase. Beside the white robe, the *ala* priest, as he is called in the second phase, would also wear a red shawl across the breast, as well as a large, thick, ring-shaped hat of white wool called **pedok* [*bal*?]. According to one of the main Nyemo *ngakpa*, an appropriate colour for the dress of the *ngakpa* would be rather black, the colour of wrathful or violent, *drakpo* [*drag po*], ritual activities, such as exorcisms, and for instance the repelling of hail.

The second phase of the ritual sequence, the *chökor* circumambulation proper, started off at the Zangri monastery. One or two representatives of each Zangri household, depending on its size, gathered in the monastery courtyard, each one carrying on his or her back a small wooden 'book frame', *petri* [*dpe khri*], on which one or several volumes of the scriptures housed in the monastery were fastened.[16] The village leader (Ch. *cunzhang*) oversaw the exit out of the courtyard of all participants in the 'proper order'—a slight variant of which was finally adopted during the procession around the fields

[16] Zangri had 117 households in 2002. Adult household members do not participate if a death has occurred in the household during the year preceding the event.

itself. The procession was preceded by a group of monks carrying long trumpets, *dungchen* [*dung chen*], and shawms, *gyaling* [*rgya gling*], instruments typically associated with the solemnity of public ceremonies held outside of the monastic halls.[17] Throughout the circumambulation, the monks periodically stopped and sounded their instruments, announcing the arrival of the procession.

The procession itself was headed by a bearer of the Communist party flag, followed by a dozen children, *chiwa* [*byis pa*], boys and girls in approximately equal numbers, the former carrying wooden 'swords' and the latter *dadar* [*mda' dar*] ritual wands, used in many prosperity rites. Throughout the circumambulation, at short intervals, the children shouted *Sole solo!* [*swo lha*(*s*) *gsol lo*], "*So*! May the gods be propitiated!" Then came the bearer of a basket containing juniper branches lying on coals, the smoke drifting out as a purificatory fumigation, *sang* [*bsang*].[18] He was followed immediately by a bearer of further supplies of juniper branches, the carrier of a pail of water for ritual cleansing, *trü* [*khrus*], and a carrier of incense. Then followed the symbolically pre-eminent participants or objects: a statue of one of the foremost deities of the Bön tradition followed in the Zangri monastery, Trowo Tsochok [Khro bo gtso mchog], Supreme Chiefly Wrathful One, carried by a monk and followed by the bearer of an imposing parasol; then a stuffed badger, *drumpa* [*grum pa*], carried attached to a stick and held with its mouth facing forward and upward;[19] and finally, preceded by a drummer, the *ala* priest himself, riding a horse led by the bridle by an assistant. These were followed lastly by the long line of book carriers (mainly women first and then men), in the midst of which marched also a few additional flag bearers.[20] The first text carried in the procession was said to be the *Sūtra of Good Fortune*, *Do Kelzang* [*Mdo skal bzang*].

The circumambulation, performed in the Bönpo, anticlockwise direction, scrupulously encircled all of the Zangri fields, as well as a few fields of neighbouring villages, when they happened to lie to the left of the most convenient path. The *ala* alone carried out the

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[17] Helffer 1994: 33.

[18] On *sang* rituals, see Karmay 1995.

[19] The badger is not mentioned in any other account of Chökor or similar rituals that I know of, but is an important figure of the Nyemo Chökor rituals, associated with the essence or fertility of the earth, *sapchü* [*sa bcud*], and the essence of prosperity, *yang* [*g.yang*].

[20] In pre-1950 times, white flags called *chadar* (or, in Nyemo, *chapdar*) [*phywa dar*], 'essence of prosperity flags', were used instead of the Communist and other flags used today.

circumambulation on horseback. (In the past, he was even carried on the back of a man at certain difficult points of the circuit.) For the major part of the circumambulation, the *ala*'s priestly role consisted in fact in nothing else than performing the circuit on horseback, dressed in the attributes of the *ala*. In what ways this might be understood to contribute to the general efficacy of the ritual did not emerge clearly from my informants' comments. One elderly Zangri villager stated that the *ala*'s function was to purify the defilements, *drip* [*grib*], of the village—an important theme that we will encounter again.

Along the way, the participants stopped for a small picnic, during which the monks and the *ala* enjoyed a more elevated position on a small hill; then the procession resumed. Shortly before reaching the village, the *ala* dismounted and, followed by the drummer, led the one or two hundred person procession into a large inward, anticlockwise spiral pattern, walking slowly around a large central fumigation (*sang*). When he finally reached the centre, the *ala* started to walk back out of the spiral (still followed by the drummer, etc.), turning this time in a clockwise direction between the lines of participants still converging toward the centre.[21] This striking feature of the Zangri Chökor is called *zhapkor zhaplok* [*zhabs skor zhabs log*], which can be roughly translated as 'circling on foot, returning on foot'. The same elderly informant as above claimed that it was related to the preserving and increasing of the essence of prosperity (*yang*) in the village.

The procession reached the outskirts of the village and headed back towards the monastery on the mountain behind the village. On its path, it stopped at three local deity shrines on that mountainside,[22] where the *ala* performed brief propitiatory offering rituals. Finally, the texts were returned to the monastery: the *chökor* circumambulation was over. The priest exchanged the clothes that connoted his activity as *ala* for his initial grey robe. He then returned with the monks to the Sumgyeling grove, where they performed the concluding section of the ritual that they had been carrying out on the day before. The village notables joined them for some final auspicious gestures and rites and the officiants were presented with their retribution. The Zangri Chökor was over.

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[21] See the video on http://www.thdl.org/ (THDL Id. 2603). After a few circles on this outward spiraling course, the *ala* decided to cut short, and led his line straight across the last lines of people still converging towards the centre. The up to that point tidily interlocked converging and diverging spirals dissolved into a somewhat messy transition back to a roughly linear procession towards the outskirts of the village.

[22] See Karmay 2000: 387–90.

The Zangri data thus suggests a distinction in terms of ritual specialisation, or function: the ritual aiming specifically at preventing hail (involving the 'ritual dagger of the *ngakpa*') is the responsibility of the *ngakpa*, while the circumambulation of the village and the cult of the village deities are that, mainly, of the *ala*. (Monastic officiants also take part, but their role is clearly secondary to that of the *ala*—hardly more than a somewhat superficial 'clerical' varnish superimposed on a ritual that in effect the monastic clergy does not control.)

THE NYEMO *NGAKPA* AND *ALA* PRIESTS

How do these data fit with the wider Nyemo picture? Throughout Nyemo (and beyond, for that matter), the protection against hail is very strongly associated with the figure of the *ngakpa*. However, concerning the rituals of the Chökor type and the cult of the village deities, the situation is not as clear.

Thus even in villages that do have an *ala*, he may not be the officiant, or not the main one. Let us consider briefly two cases. In Pagor [Pa gor] village, the Cultural Revolution occurred in the youth of the local *ala*, and the local transmission of the *ala* practice was severely disrupted. Although the *ala* is still living, when the ritual resumed in the 1980s the village asked the neighbouring, and much more qualified Zangri *ala* to officiate in his place. The Pagor people refer to the latter as the Zangri *ala*, and, adding the honorific particle -*lak* [*lags*], address him respectfully as *ala-lak*. Interestingly, the Pagor *ala* and his son tend to distinguish the latter from themselves by referring to him as *ngakpa*. This use of the term is actually quite coherent with the ritual specialisation suggested above, as the Pagor *ala* and his son are careful to point out that the Zangri specialist officiates for the prevention of hail, which their lineage, at least in the last generations, has not done. (In passing, we may also note that *ngakpa* is never used as a term of address like *ala* here; thus the two terms also exhibit slight distinctions in register.)

A second case: in Marlam [Mar lam], which currently has the most educated and ritually qualified *ala* of the Nyemo area, this specialist performs on the occasion of the Chökor only the cult of the village deities, and does not even take part in the circumambulation, which is led by a group of six monks from the Gyelche [Rgyal byed]

(pronounced Gyachi) monastery, of the Geluk [Dge lugs] order (situated at quite a distance on the other side of the Nyemo river).

Aspects of the Marlam Chökor ritual, as well as local history, provide clues as to the possible reason of this partial exclusion of the *ala*. Marlam is characterised by a strongly Geluk context: Marlam, and in particular the former Marlam nobles, were sponsors of the Gyelche monastery. In the Chökor procession, a painting, *tangka* [*thang ka*], figuring Tsongkapa [Tsong kha pa] is one of the first objects carried, and the first text is always the *Lamrim Chenmo* [Lam rim chen mo].[23] Historically, as compared to the Nyingma [Rnying ma] and Bönpo traditions to which tantrists are predominantly affiliated, the much more exclusively monastic Geluk order, a strong component of the former Central Tibetan state, has been characterised, beyond its internal diversity, by stronger tendencies towards religious exclusivism and politico-religious hegemony. The socially and symbolically Geluk-dominated context of the Marlam Chökor ritual may go a long way in explaining the strict separation between monks and *ala*, and the latter's reduced role, notwithstanding his ritual qualification. (The young Marlam *ala* however suggested rather a historical accident in the transmission of the *ala*'s function of circumambulating the fields, a function held in the past by the Marlam *ala* according to him.)

If we go over to the case of villages in which a *ngakpa* resides, we find that the local *ngakpa* is generally the officiant. In some cases of rituals of the Chökor type, I am even told that we find a *ngakpa* and an *ala* officiating side by side. Finally, villages devoid of either *ala* or *ngakpa* call a specialist from another village, an *ala* in some cases, a *ngakpa* in others. (Relative proximity to one or the other is not always the determining factor in the choice.) The Zangri *ala* is probably the officiant with the most extended network of villages that rely on his ritual services for their Chökor: every summer he spends altogether twenty-one days performing such rituals, for a total of eight villages. A prominent *ngakpa* however, from Ritso [Ri tsho] village, is very much in demand too.

We thus have *ala* who do not carry out typical *ala* ritual activities, and *ngakpa* who do. Beyond the question of the individual specialists' degree and form of involvement in Chökor rituals, if we take into consideration the broader socio-religious picture in each of these cases

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[23] The *Lamrim* (or, in Nyemo, often *Lamdrim*) *Chenmo*, or *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* [*to Enlightenment*], is one of the most important texts authored by Tsongkapa (1357–1419), the founder of the Geluk tradition.

(some further elements will be examined below), then one realises that the Ritso *ngakpa*, the Zangri line of *ala*-cum-*ngakpa*, and the Marlam *ala* all present a highly similar socio-religious profile. We are dealing in each case with non-monastic priestly lineages organised by succession through descent. These priests all have in common a religious education centred on a curriculum of text and visualisation-based (Buddhist or Bönpo) tantric ritual practices. This education has been received mainly at local religious centres (such as Zangri for the Bönpo tradition), but in part also from more prominent centres and masters outside of Nyemo (such as the major Central Tibetan Bönpo monastic establishment of Yungdrungling [G.yung drung gling] in the case of the Bönpo *ala* and *ngakpa*). Their religious activity is based on very similar combinations of domestic, primarily text-based, Buddhist or Bönpo ritual services (propitiatory and apotropaic rituals notably) and a few collective rituals such as the Chökor or Ongkor. Their ritual activity is organised according to similar territorial networks of individual and collective patronage. It would involve forcing the actual data into predefined, ill-fit categories if we simply invoked certain ‘pragmatic’, ‘contingent’ reasons for local arrangements that do not conform to the tidy distinction between hail preventing *ngakpa* and Chökor performing *ala*.

Basically, it seems that, in Nyemo actual practice, no two *types* of religious specialists are to be distinguished. What may be delineated, though, are two more abstract categories of *ala* and *ngakpa*, as they appear in Nyemo discourse. Of course this discourse is itself plural and diverse, but general trends, as well as socio-linguistic coherences behind apparent divergences, can be identified. These categories of *ala* and *ngakpa* are defined by a whole range of connotations and contrastive attributes, which we have only begun to explore through the dual structure of the Chökor ritual sequence.

THE NYEMO *NGAKPA* AND *ALA* CATEGORIES

I will first present other elements of Nyemo discourse relative to *ngakpa* and *ala* ritual specialisations and then go over to another important dimension, that of status hierarchies. A prominent theme in Nyemo discourses on the figure of the *ngakpa* is actually common throughout Tibetan areas: it is the association of these specialists with exorcistic and other powerful, violent (*drakpo*) ritual activities, and notably with the warding off of hail. (As Nebesky-Wojkowitz and

others have pointed out, the ritual procedures employed for the latter purpose are very often technically exorcisms.) This discourse emphasises the *ngakpa*'s strong ritual power, notably his powerful mantras, *ngak*, and even the notion of *tu* [*mthu*], a strong, often destructive, power—all very widespread themes regarding Tibetan *ngakpa*.[24]

The *ala*, in contrast, appears to be associated mainly with circumambulation rituals like the Chökor, the cult of place gods, and rituals of purification (an activity referred to most commonly as *drip sel* [*grib sel*], 'removing pollution'). The *ala*'s participation in the Chökor itself was mentioned, as we have seen, as aiming at the purification of the village, and other features of the ritual, such as the carrying of water for ritual cleansing, *trü*, suggest a similar aim. Two other contexts are mentioned recurrently for the *ala*'s purification rituals: death, and the birth of an illegitimate child (**chemnak*), which in certain parts of Nyemo is thought to bring a state of defilement to the entire village. Powerful or violent (*drakpo*) activities on the one side, purification on the other: the associations that we find in local discourses and ritual contexts between black clothes and the *ngakpa*, as well as between white clothes and the *ala* are probably to be seen in relation with these central ritual orientations.

Finally, some rituals seem to be associated in local discourse frequently both with *ngakpa* and with *ala*. This is the case particularly of rituals performed in the marriage context, like the introduction of the bride to her new domestic deity, or the act of attaching a turquoise on the top of the head of the bride (accompanied by a song called *yushé* [*g.yu bshad*], the 'explanation of the turquoise').[25] To a lesser degree, rituals of propitiatory worship of the domestic deity are also often associated with both categories of priests.

The ritual specialisations and orientations that are associated with the *ala* or *ngakpa* also importantly have implications in terms of status. When the *ngakpa*'s ritual power is celebrated, implicitly he is probably placed somewhat above the *ala* (although a comparison in those terms was never voiced explicitly). Other contrasts with status

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[24] See Sihlé 2001: ch. 13.

[25] According to a very knowledgeable elderly informant, in the past, at least in certain Nyemo villages, the officiant (it used to be an *ala*) who sang the 'explanation of the turquoise' was called *aya-bönpo*. This name both indicates a Bönpo religious identity and confirms the strong possibility of a link between the Nyemo *ala* and the *aya* which have been described elsewhere, as in the northern Nepalese region of Baragaon. This possibility is further supported by the occurrence of another term used to refer to such priests in parts of the Tibetan Himalayas, namely *lhabön:* in one Nyemo village, the Zangri *ala* is politely addressed as *lhabön-lak*.

implications appear if we consider some more general properties of these two categories. Thus, fundamentally, the *ngakpa* is a classic, and sometimes clearly charismatic, figure of Tibetan religion. In contrast, the *ala* is understood locally, especially by more knowledgeable informants, as a local Nyemo category that lacks the authority of both widespread use and textual foundation. When I asked an old, knowledgeable and highly literate Bönpo informant about the spelling of the word *ala*, he paused, slightly embarrassed, and said: "well, in fact they are *ngakpa*".

One may note that the Bönpo affiliation of all Nyemo *ala* is itself something that may bear the stigma of a religion considered by some Buddhists as a lower, mundane, non-soteriological religion. Many Nyemo Bönpos are adamant that their being Bönpo in no way means that they are *chipa* [*phyi pa*] (the Buddhist term for 'outsiders', that is, non-Buddhists), and argue quite justly that they also take refuge in the Buddha. Interestingly, the typical activities of the *ala*—the cult of local deities, fertility rites, etc.—are also typical examples, within Buddhist discourse, of the supposedly more mundane Bön religion.

Another element expresses again a distinction of status, with a structural clarity comparable to that of certain origin myths. The Zangri *ala*-cum-*ngakpa* family line is said to have comprised, some four generations ago, two brothers who each held one of the two functions. The elder was a *ngakpa*, the younger an *ala*. Then only one son was born, and the two functions were inherited by one and the same person. This genealogical fragment also expresses very clearly that the two terms can function as designations, not of types of *specialists*, but of types of *functions*, possibly taken up by the same flesh-and-blood persons—something that generally does not come out in local discourses, in which the two terms primarily seem to designate types of specialists.

CONCLUSION: A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICES DIFFERENTIATED BY IDEOLOGICALLY BASED HIERARCHIES

I would like to end with a note or two from a more sociological perspective, and to return, in so doing, to the actual specialists called *ala* or *ngakpa* in Nyemo society. In terms of their position within the social stratification of a pre-1950 Central Tibetan agricultural society,

the pre-eminent status described by Aziz for *ngakpa* lineages[26] actually only applied, in Nyemo, to a few (Buddhist or Bönpo) lineages referred to rather as *lama* than *ngakpa* lineages. The *ngakpa* discussed here are of commoner—or, following Goldstein (1986), 'serf'—or *miser* [*mi ser*] status. They did, however, enjoy a slightly privileged social status as compared to simple lay commoners. Whether the *ala* and *ngakpa* were differentiated in this regard is not clear. I would suggest that more relevant criteria of status, or factors of prestige, might have been the degree of literacy and more generally of religious expertise that the particular specialist was credited with, the extent of their patronage networks, etc.

Finally, the above anecdote concerning the spelling of the word *ala* illustrates one important fact, namely that the *ala* category is, at least potentially, included within that of the *ngakpa*. Now, if we look at marriage patterns, it is extremely striking that, basically, *ala* and *ngakpa* constitute *together* a highly endogamous group within which the *ala* vs. *ngakpa* distinction seems, in terms of marriage patterns, totally absent. The rationale for this highly preferred and strongly practised group endogamy is expressed in the same terms by *ngakpa* or *ala* informants: it is important for the priest's ritual power, *tu-ngak* [*mthu sngags*] or *tu-nü* [*mthu nus*], that both his mother's patrilineage and his father's patrilineage (*shagyü* [*sha rgyud*] and *rügyü* [*rus rgyud*], literally 'flesh-lineage' and 'bone-lineage') are *ngakpa* lineages*, ngakgyü* [*sngags rgyud*]. (The fact that even in the case of *ala* lineages the terminology used here is that of '*ngakpa* lineage' may have something to do with the fact that this notion is the widely established currency, so to speak, that enables the relatively few *ala* lineages to engage in matrimonial relations with a wider set of prestigious potential partners.)

In conclusion, sociologically, in Nyemo, the *ala* are *ngakpa*, a (local, Bönpo) sub-category of *ngakpa*. The designations of *ala* or *ngakpa* are, as a rule, inherited patrilineally, but the actual socioreligious features of a given priest may vary substantially according to historical conditions, individual aspirations and qualities, etc. To say that we have in Nyemo two *types* of religious specialists would be a misrepresentation of the actual socio-religious features of these priests. What we do have is a set of distinctions that define the local concepts of *ala* and *ngakpa*; these are primarily distinctions of religious specialisation and religious attributes (in a nutshell, purification, fertility and local deity cults vs. exorcistic power and

[26] Aziz 1978: 53–55.

mastery over hail), and distinctions of status: the Bönpo *ala* is something of a lesser *ngakpa*. This should not come to us as a surprise, in a Buddhist-dominated society in which Tantric power is so highly valued. The local, hybrid Nyemo *ala* tradition, in actual practice so close to that of the *ngakpa*, appears thus to be differentiated from the former primarily by ideologically based hierarchies.

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མདོ་སྨད་རེབ་གོང་ཡུལ་གྱི་ལྷ་པ།

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English Summary:[1]

THE ‘SPIRIT MEDIUMS’ (*LHA PA*) OF REB GONG IN A MDO

DANZANG CAIRANG

A Brief History of Mediums in Tibet

According to Tibetan historical literature such as the *Zhang bod lo rgyus ti se’i ’od,* the *Mkha’ ’gro ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi rnam thar gter ma*, and the *Rba bzhed*, during the pre-Buddhist era when the Bon tradition dominated the land, the performers of spirit mediumship (*lha pa*) were very popular. They also had significant influence in political decision-making in their communities. From the seventeenth century onward, the Tibetan government officially started to employ the official mediums of dharma protector deities (*gzhung bsten bstan srung*) as a religious and political tool in both its political and military spheres.

There are various terms used in Tibetan to identify spirit mediums (*lha pa*). In the case of the official dharma protectors, such as *Gnas chung chos skyong* (the Dharma protector of Gnas chung), who is consulted for his ability to predict both positive and negative events, the term *sku rten* is used. For the mediums of those deities who represent themselves as local guardians and mountain deities, the term *lha pa* is more popular. In the Reb gong area, the newly assigned *lha pa* is called *thung ri*.

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[1] Many thanks to Dr Yangbum Gyal for this English summary and for editing Danzang Cairang’s article.

Spirit Mediums in Reb gong

Before 1958, most villages in Regbong had two *lha pas*. As they usually represented different local guardians and mountain deities, they were called to perform an essential role not only in the religious and social realm, but also in maintaining the welfare and political harmony of their community. Therefore for the villages of the Reb gong area, the *lha pa* was not only a religious leader, but he was also considered to be a protector.

In the twenty years between 1958 and 1978, as a consequence of the implementation of anti-religious policies and Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, most religious monuments were destroyed and the majority of religious practices forbidden. This was the case for the practice of *lha pa* as well, which for a long time was abandoned. However, during the Klu rol festival and Losar celebrations usually held during the 6th month of the lunar calendar, the people of Reb gong continued to secretly worship and offer services to the local guardians and mountain deities. Additionally, they also occasionally sought spiritual help and guidance from *lha pa* whenever possible. Such a relationship between the people of Reb gong and their *lha pa* never stopped.

In the post-Cultural Revolution years, thanks to the openness policy, political restrictions were loosened and religion was tolerated. Many local communities were allowed to restore their religious monuments and the role of *lha pa* gradually resurfaced again in villages and their practice was met with renewed momentum. However, due to the social, cultural and ideological changes along with the material development promoted by the government, the role and impact of *lha pas* in local life was kept within limits. In addition to that, influenced by the new lifestyle and modern culture, people recently have started to see them more as human beings, thus removing the divine status they enjoyed in the past. Furthermore, the often problematic tensions generated by *lha pas*' moral misconduct in the past had a strong influence on the ordinary people and has affected their attitude towards their status. Therefore, the activities and the role of *lha pa* have changed accordingly in recent years. *Lha pa* have started to abide by people's standards of moral discipline and to have a greater role in the educational welfare and environmental protection of their communities.

The Recruitment, Rituals, and Regalia of Spirit Mediums

Traditionally, *lha pas* come from a family lineage. When a *lha pa* lineage is broken, a search for a new *lha pa* takes place by consulting a group of religious personalities and lamas. The new *lha pa* would be selected among a group of male candidates in accordance with a series of religious rituals. After becoming a fully-ordained *lha pa*, engaging in funerary and polluting activities during the Klu rol festival and Losar in the sixth month was prohibited.

When a *lha pa* goes into trance, he utters words unintelligible to ordinary people. Therefore, they are believed to speak *lha skad*, or divine language. The *lha pas* not only use this language to express their thoughts in idioms and songs, but they also employ various hand gestures to convey the meaning of their communication and indications.

An interesting element of these mediums is their outfit. During their séances, *lha pas* wear an upper outfit, boots, and a small-sized *thang ka* as well as a blessed thread and amulet while they perform their duties. Before going into trance, a *lha pa* typically puts on this outfit and then offers a fire-*puja* and juniper incense. Usually a new, inexperienced *lha pa* takes some time to go into trance, but an experienced, old *lha pa* go into trance in a relatively short time.

Attitudes Towards Spirit Mediums

The author concludes this essay by considering that because traditional beliefs have been deeply rooted in Tibetan society, Tibetan people are still restricted by old thoughts. He believes that the perception of the efficacy of *lha pas* as miraculously powerful is an obstacle to people's mental development. Therefore, the author argues that *lha pas*' activities should be promoted and preserved only as a century-old tradition and social custom. Although they should not be understood a source of thought or means to guide society, they can be understood as being in accordance with social welfare.

མདོ་སྨད་རེབ་གོང་ཡུལ་གྱི་ལྷ་པ།

བསྟན་འཛིན་ཚེ་རིང་།

གཅིག   བོད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་པ་བྱུང་ཚུལ་མདོར་བསྡུས།

དམངས་སྲོལ་རིག་པའི་ཟུར་ནས་བརྗོད་ན་འཛམ་གླིང་སྤྱིའི་ལྷ་བ་ནི་ཆེས་ཐོག་མར་མ་རྒྱུད་རུས་རྒྱུད་ཚོ་བའི་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་སུ་ལྷ་པ་བྱུང་བར་འདོད་པ་དང་།   མཁས་དབང་ནམ་མཁའི་ནོར་བུའི་《ཞང་བོད་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཏི་སེའི་འོད》དུ་ "སྣང་གསལ་པྲ་ཡི་ལུགས་འདི་ནི་ཕྱྭ་གཤེན་པའི་ལུགས་ 'ཡི་དབང་ལྷའི་བཀའ་བབས་' ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་བོན་གྱི་བྱེ་བྲག་ཅིག་ཡིན་ཞིང་།   དེ་ལའང་པྲ་རྟེན་ཕོ་མོ་སྲུའང་རྟུང་བའི་མིག་གི་སྣང་ཆ་ལ་བབས་པའི་པྲ་ཞིག་དང་རྣ་བའི་སྒྲོའི་སྣང་ཆ་ལ་བབས་པའི་པྲ་ཞིག   ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཀུན་རྟོགས་གི་སྣང་ཆ་ལ་བབས་པའི་པྲ་ཞིག་བཅས་སྐྱེས་བུའི་ལུས་ངག་ཡིད་གསུམ་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་པྲའི་ཚུལ་ལུགས་གསུམ་དུ་སྲིད་པ་ཡིན"[2] ཞེས་དང་།   《མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཡེ་ཤེས་མཚོ་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རྣམ་ཐར་གཏེར་མར》བོན་ཆོས་སུ་པྲ་ཕབ་པ་ཡོད་ཚུལ་གསལ་བ་ལ་གཞིགས་ན་བོད་ལ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཆོས་ལུགས་མ་དར་གོང་ལྷ་འདྲེ་མི་ཁོག་ཏུ་བརླམས་པའི་སྲོལ་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་པ་དང་།   སྐབས་དེའི་

[2] 《ཞང་བོད་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཏི་སེའི་འོད》 Page ༡༨༨

ལྷ་པའི་མིང་ལ་“ཕྲ་རྟེན” ཟེར། བོད་རྒྱལ་གཉའ་ཁྲི་བཙན་པོ་ནས་ལྷ་ཐོ་ཐོ་རིའི་བར་རྒྱལ་རབས་ཉེར་བདུན་རིང་ཆབ་སྲིད་སྒྲུང་ལྡེ་བོན་གསུམ་གྱིས་བསྐྱངས་པ་ལས་བོན་གྱིས་བསྐྱངས་པ་དོན་ལ་སྒྲུ་བོན་ཆབ་སྲིད་དུ་ཞུགས་པ་ཡིན་ལ། བོད་རྒྱལ་སྲོང་བཙན་སྐབས་བློན་པོ་ཁྱུང་པོ་སྤུང་སད་ཟུ་ཙེས་སྒྲུ་རྟེན་པའི་བཀའ་བཀོད་ལྟར་ཞང་ཞུང་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལིག་མི་རྒྱ་བཏུལ་བ་དང་། བོད་རྒྱལ་ཁྲི་སྲོང་ལྡེ་བཙན་སྐབས་མཁན་སློབ་གཉིས་ལ་བསྟེན་ནས་བོན་གྱི་ལྷ་ལ་བན་གྱི་ཆོས་བསྲེས་ཏེ་བན་ཕྱོགས་སུ་བཀུག་པ་དང་། བོན་ལུགས་ལས་བརྒྱུད་པའི་ལྷ་གསོལ་བསང་གཏོང་གི་ཡུལ་སྲོལ་གོམས་གཞིས་སྲོལ། ནང་པར་བཀུག་པའི་ལྷ་རྣམས་མིའི་ལུས་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ནས་འགྲོ་དོན་མཛད་ཆེད། «སྦ་བཞེད»དུ “གཟིམས་མལ་བ་ལྷ་ལུང་འཚོ་ཞེར་སྣན་ལེགས་ལ་ཕྲ་རྟེན་བྲྭ་སྟེ། ཕྲ་ས་ན་ཕྲ་ཕབ་ནས་སྨྲ་བསྐྱལ་ནས། བོད་ཀྱི་ཀླུ་མི་བསྲུན་པ་རིལ་གྱི་མིང་སྨྲས་ཏེ་འཕང་ཐང་དུ་ཆུ་ཕབ་པ་ཤམ་པོ། ལྷ་སར་ཐོག་ཕབ་པ་ཐང་ལྷ། སྨུ་གེ་དང་ལོ་ཉེས་དང་། མི་ནད་གཏོང་བ་བརྟན་མ་བཅུ་གཉིས་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཀུན་སྨྲས། དེའི་སང་ཚེ་རིས་བཟང་པོའི་བུ་ཚ་ཕ་མ་དང་མེས་ཕྱི་ཚང་བ་བཅུ་གསུམ་བསགས་ཏེ་ཕྲ་རྟེན་བགྱིས་ནས། རྒྱལ་པོ་ཆེན་པོ་བཞིའི་ཕྲ་ཕབ་ནས་གནོད་སྦྱིན་མི་ལྷས་ཞལ་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་བསྟན།”[3] ཞེས་

[3] «སྦ་བཞེད» Page ༢༩

གསུངས་པ་བཞིན་ཐོག་མར་ལྷ་ལུང་འཚོ་ཞེར་སྣན་ལེགས་ལ་ཚོད་ལྟ་བགྱིས་ནས་འགྲུབ་པ་ལས་རིམ་གྱིས་མི་བཙུ་ཙམ་པྲ་ཧེན་བྱས་ཏེ་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཆེན་པོ་བཞི་ཕབ་པ་ཡིས་གཟིམས་མལ་བ་ལྷ་ལུང་འཚོ་ཞེར་སྣན་ལེགས་ནི་བོད་ཀྱི་བན་བོན་མཉམ་བསྲེས་ཀྱི་ལྷ་པ་ཐོག་མ་ཡིན་པ་དང་། ད་ལྟ་ང་ཚོ་བོད་ཀྱི་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་འཚོ་བའི་དར་ཁྱབ་ཆེ་བའི་བན་བོན་མཉམ་བསྲེས་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ཕབ་རྩལ་སྐབས་དེར་ཐོག་མར་བྱུང་བ་ཡིན།

ཁྲི་རལ་བ་ཅན་གྱི་དུས་སུ་བོན་བློན་སྦས་སྟག་རྣས་བྲན་ཀ་དཔལ་ཡོན་རྒྱལ་པོའི་བཙུན་མོར་ལྐོག་འབྲེལ་ཡོད་པར་ཁ་གཡར་ནས་སྐུ་བོན་རྣམས་བསླུས་ཏེ་ཐོག་མར་བློན་པོ་དང་བཙུན་མོ་བཀྲོངས་པ་དང་། ཕྱིས་སུ་རྒྱལ་པོ་བཀྲོངས་པ་ལ་ཡང་སྐུ་བོན་གྱི་ནུས་པ་གལ་ཆེན་ཐོན་པ་ཡིན། ༡༦༨༢ ལོ་ནས་བཟུང་བོད་གཞུང་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་ “གཞུང་བསྟེན་བསྟན་སྲུང་” ཞེས་པ་སྟེ་གནས་ཆུང་ཆོས་སྐྱོང་དང་། ལོ་མོ་ཚངས་པ། བསམ་ཡས་ཙེའུ་དམར་པོ། འབྲས་སྤུངས་བསྟན་མ། དགའ་གདོང་བསྟན་སྲུང་བཅས་ལ་གསོལ་མཆོད་བྱས་ཏེ་མིའི་ལུས་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ནས་བོད་གཞུང་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་ཆབ་སྲིད་དང་དམག་དོན་སོགས་གལ་ཆེན་དག་ལྷ་རྣམས་ལ་ལུང་བསྟན་བྱས་ནས་རྩ་བའི་ཆ་ནས་ལྷའི་ལུང་བསྟན་ལ་བརྩི་མཐོང་བྱེད་པའི་ལུགས་སྲོལ་རིམ་གྱིས་བོད་ཀྱི་དམངས་ཁྲོད་དུ་དར་

ཏེ་ནང་བསྟན་ཆོས་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་གར་ཁྱབ་ལ་ཁྱབ་པ་དང་། ལུང་བ་རེ་ན་མི་སྡེ་རེ། སྡེ་བ་རེ་ལ་གཞི་བདག་རེ། གཞི་བདག་རེ་ལ་ལྷ་པ་རེ་ཡོད་པའི་ཚོད་དུ་སླེབས་ཡོད།

ལྷ་པ་ཕོ་མོ་གང་ཡིན་གྱི་ཆ་ནས། «ཞང་བོད་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཏི་སེའི་འོད» དང་ «སྦ་བཞེད» «ཆོས་སྲིད་ཟུང་འབྲེལ»སོགས་སུ་ཕ་མ་གཉིས་འཛོམས་ཀྱི་བུ་དང་བུ་མོ་གང་ཡང་རུང་བར་བརྗོད་པ་མ་ཟད། ཨའོ་ཧྲིས་ལི་ཡི་བོ་ཙེ་ཁི་བས་ཚིའི་ «བོད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་འདྲེ་གདོན་བགེགས»སུ་ “སྤྱིར་བཏང་གི་ཆོས་ཉིད་ཅིག་ནི། གནས་ཚུལ་མང་ཆེ་བར་ཕོ་ལྷ་སྐྱེས་པའི་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་པ་དང་། མོ་ལྷ་སྐྱེས་དམན་གྱི་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་པ་ཡིན། སྐྱེས་པའི་ལྷ་པས་བོད་བརྒྱུད་ནང་བསྟན་ཆོས་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ཁྲོད་གོ་གནས་གལ་ཆེན་བཟུང་ཡོད་པས་བུད་མེད་རྣམས་དང་བསྡུར་ན་ཆེས་མང་བ་ཡིན”[4] ཞེས་གསལ་བ་བཞིན་ལྷ་པ་ཕོ་མོ་གང་རུང་ཆོག་ཀྱང་གཙོ་བོ་སྐྱེས་པ་ཡིན་པ་དང་། ད་ལྟ་བོད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་དང་ལྷག་པར་རེབ་གོང་དུ་ལྷ་མ་ཞིག་གོ་ཐོས་སུ་མ་བྱུང་བ་འདི་ནི་བོད་ཀྱི་ཕོ་མཆོག་མོ་དམན་གྱི་འདུ་ཤེས་ལས་བྱུང་བ་ཡིན།

ལྷ་པའི་མིང་གི་ཆ་ནས། གནས་ཆུང་ཆོས་སྐྱོང་སོགས་མིའི་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ཏེ་ལེགས་ཉེས་ལུང་བསྟན་གནང་མཁན་ལ་ “སྐུ་རྟེན” ཟེར་བ་དང་།

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[4] «བོད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་འདྲེ་གདོན་བགེགས» Page ༡༨༤- ༡༨༦

བོད་གངས་ཅན་གྱི་ཡུལ་གྲུ་ཕལ་ཆེ་བར་མངའ་བའི་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་སོགས་མིའི་ལུས་པོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ནས་ལྷའི་འདོད་དོན་ལུང་དུ་སྟོན་མཁན་ལ་ཡོངས་གྲགས་སུ་ "ལྷ་པ" ཟེར་བ་དང་། རེབ་གོང་ས་ཁུལ་དུ་ལྷ་གསར་ལ་ "ཐུང་རི" ཞེས་འབོད་པ་ཡིན་ལ། «བོད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་འདྲ་གདོན་བགེགས»སུ་ "ལྷ་པ་ཞེས་པའི་མིང་འདི་དམའ་རིམ་འཛིག་རྟེན་པའི་ལྷ་དག་མིའི་ལུས་པོག་ཏུ་བརླམསཔའི་གང་ཟག་ལ་བཀོལ་བ་ཡིན"[5] ཞེས་བརྗོད་པ་དང་གཞི་གཅིག་ཏུ་མཐུན་ནོ།

གཉིས། རེབ་གོང་ཡུལ་གྱི་ལྷ་པ་བཤད་པ།

དང་པོ། དུས་རབས ༢༠ པའི་ལོ་རབས ༦༠ སྔོན་གྱི་ལྷ་པ།

༡༩༤༨ ལོའི་སྔོན་དུ་རེབ་གོང་ས་ཁུལ་དུ་ལྷ་པ་ཧ་ཅང་དར་ཁྱབ་ཆེ་བ་སྟེ་ཕལ་ཆེར་སྡེ་བ་རེ་ལ་ལྷ་པ་གཉིས་རེ་ཡོད་པ་དཔེར་ན། སོག་རུ་ལ་ལྷ་པ་གཉིས། ཀོའུ་སྡེ་སྡེ་བརྒྱད་ཚོ་དགུ་ལ་ལྷ་པ་རེ་རེ། ལྷུང་སྐྱུར་ལྷ་པ་གཉིས་ལྟ་བུ། ལྷ་པ་འགའ་རེ་ཡོད་པའང་སྡེ་བ་རེར་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་མི་འདྲ་བ་ཁ་ཤས་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན། དཔེར་ན། ལྷུང་སྐྱུས་རྨོག་རྒོད་དང་ཁྲ་གཟན་གཉིས། སོག་རུས་ཡུལ་ལྷ་དང་བློན་པོ། ཤན་པ་ཙི་ཐུང་གསུམ། ལྷུང་ལུང་གིས་ཤེས་བྲག་དང་

སྟག་ལུང་གཉིས་བཅས་བསྟེན་པ་དང་། ལྷ་པ་ཚོར་ལྷ་གང་འབབ་ཀྱི་གཏན་འཁེལ་ཡོད་དེ། ལྕང་སྐྱའི་ལྷ་པ་ཀླུ་འབུམ་རྒྱལ་ཨ་མྱེས་རྨོག་རྒོད་འབབ་པ་དང་ལྷ་པ་འཕགས་པ་བསྟན་གོ་ཨ་མྱེས་གཉན་ཆེན་འབབ་པ་ཡིན། དེ་ལྟར་བྱས་ན་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་རང་རང་གི་ལས་དོན་བསྒྲུབ་ཕྱིར་ལྷ་པའི་ལུས་ཁོག་ཏུ་གང་འདོད་ལྟར་ཞུགས་ཆོག་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ལས་ལྡོག་ན་ལྷ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ལྷ་པ་གཅིག་བརྩད་ནས་མ་མཐུན་པར་ཐུང་རི་ལ་གནོད་པ་སྐྱེལ་བའི་གནས་ཚུལ་ཀྱང་ཡོད།

སྐབས་དེར་རེབ་གོང་མི་སྡེ་སོ་སོས་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་མི་བསྟེན་པ་དང་ལྷ་པ་མེད་པ་མི་སྲིད་ལ། སྡེ་བའི་ཁ་འགོ་པའང་ལྷ་པས་བྱེད་པ་སྟེ། ཁོང་གིས་ནང་ཁྲུལ་གྱི་འགལ་བ་འདུམ་ལ། གཞན་དང་འཁྲུག་པའི་འཐབ་རྩུས་འཐེན་པ་མ་ཟད། ལྷ་འདྲེ་གདོན་བགེགས་དང་ངན་སྔགས་མཐུ་དམོའི་གནོད་པ་འགོག་པ་དང་། བླ་མ་དང་མི་མང་གི་ལོ་གཅིག་གི་བར་ཆད་སེལ་ཆེད་རིམ་གྲོ་བསྒྲུབ་པ་བཅས་སྡེ་བའི་ཐོག་མཐའ་བར་གསུམ་གྱི་བྱ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལྷ་པའི་བཀའ་བཀོད་གནང་ལ་ཁ་ལེན་ཚིག་བརྗེའང་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན།

རེབ་གོང་མི་མང་གི་བསམ་པའི་གོ་རྟོགས་དམའ་ཞིང་འདུ་ཤེས་རྙིང་བས་བཅིངས་པ། དཔལ་འབྱོར་དང་རིག་གནས་གང་ཅིའི་ཐད་ལ་འཕེལ་རྒྱས་མེད་

པས་མིའི་ན་ཚ་དང་། ཕྱུགས་ཀྱི་གོད་ཁ། ཞིང་གི་ཐན་པ། རྒྱུའི་བོར་གཏོར་གང་བྱུང་ཡང་ཐོག་མར་འཇིག་རྟེན་པའི་ལྷ་ལ་སྐྱབས་སུ་འགྲོ་བ་ལས་སྨན་པ་སོགས་ལ་སྟོན་པ་ཉུང་། ལྷ་པས་ཀྱང་ནད་པར་སྨན་པའི་ཚུལ་བཞིན་མི་ཕྱུགས་རྒྱུ་གསུམ་གྱི་བར་ཆད་དུས་ཐོག་ཏུ་སེལ་ཐུབ་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན། སྐབས་དེར་ཁྱི་སྨྱོན་དང་སྤྱང་སྨྱོན་ལ་ཐུག་ཚེ་མིག་གིས་མཐོང་བ་ཙམ་གྱིས་མི་སྨྱོ་བར་བྱེད་པའི་ནད་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་དང་། དེར་སྨན་པར་ཐབས་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་ལ། ལྷ་པ་ཕབ་ཚེ་ཁོང་གིས་དངོས་སུ་མི་སྨྱོས་པའི་རྒྱབ་ཀྱི་གནས་ངེས་ཅན་ཞིག་གྲིས་གཏར་རྗེས་རང་གི་ཁས་རྨ་ཁ་ནས་ཁྱི་ཕྲུག་གམ་སྤྱང་ཕྲུག་འཇིབས་ལེན་བྱས་ཏེ་ནད་གསོ་ཐུབ་པ་བདག་གི་ཕ་མ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་དངོས་སུ་མཐོང་།

རེབ་གོང་ཉ་ལུང་གི་མི་ཞིག་གིས་ལྷ་སར་འགྲོ་བའི་ལམ་ཁར་རྒྱ་མགོ་ཞིག་གི་ནང་ཁྲག་ཐིག་ཅིག་ལྷུང་དུ་བཙུག་པས་ཀླུའི་གནོད་པ་ཐེབས་ཏེ་རྐང་ལག་ན་བ་ན། ཀོའུ་སྡེ་ལྷ་པ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་འབུམ་ཕབ་ནས་ཇི་བཞིན་བརྗོད་པ་དང་ནད་སེལ་བྱེད་དུ་རྒྱ་མགོ་དེར་གཏེར་འཕྲོད་དགོས་ཟེར། འོན་ཀྱང་ས་ཐག་ཧ་ཅང་རིང་བས་སྐབས་མེད་པའི་དུས་དེར་ལྷ་པ་བབས་ནས་ཕེབས་ཏེ་རྒྱ་མགོ་དེའི་ནང་གི་ཀླུ་མོ་ཞིག་ས་འདིའི་རྒྱ་མགོ་ཞིག་གི་ནང་མནའ་མར་ཡོང་ཡོད་པ་དེར་བསྐྱུར་ཆོག་ཟེར་ནས་མཚན་ཞིག་ གཏེར་དེ་སྨུན་ནག་ནང་གཡུགས་པ་དང་ནད་རིམ་གྱིས་སངས།

དུར་ལད་ཀྱིས་ཁྲིམ་ཚང་ལ་གནོད་པ་སྐྱེལ་ཐུབ་སྟེ། ལྷ་པ་བན་དེ་

རྒྱལ་གྱིས་རྟ་མགྲིན་དབང་རྒྱལ་ཚང་ལ་དུར་ལད་ཀྱིས་གནོད་པ་ལ་མདའ་བཙུགས་ནས་བཀག་དུས་ས་འོག་ཏུ་བྱིས་པའི་རུས་པ་ཁ་ཚང་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་དངོས་སུ་མཐོང་། དུར་ལད་ཀྱི་གནོད་པ་ནི་དུས་སྐབས་དེར་བྱིས་པ་ཞི་བ་གཞན་དུ་མི་འཕེན་པར་ཁྱིམ་ནས་ས་འོག་ཏུ་འཛུག་པ་ཡིན་ལ། དུར་དེ་ཉམས་ནས་སླར་ཁྱིམ་ཚང་ལ་གནོད་པ་དེ་ཡིན།

མདོར་ན་ཆོས་ལུགས་དད་མོས་ལ་རང་དབང་ཡོད་ཅིང་ལྷ་པ་བླ་མ་བཞིན་བཀུར་བའི་དུས་དེར་རེབ་གོང་ས་ཁུལ་དུ་ལྷ་པ་ས་ཁྲབ་རྫོ་ཁྲབ་ཏུ་གྱུར་ཡོད་ལ། མང་ཚོགས་ལ་དད་པ་ཡོད་ཅིང་། བྱ་བྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་ལྷ་པ་བཞིན་སྒྲུབ་པ་དང་། ལྷ་པ་མེད་ན་མགོན་མེད་སྐྱབས་མེད་ལྟ་བུར་གྱུར་ཡོད།

གཉིས། དུས་རབས ༢༠ བའི་ལོ་རབས ༦༠_༨༠ བར་གྱི་ལྷ་པ།

༡༩༧༨ ལོར་ལྷ་མེད་འདྲེ་མེད་ཀྱི་སྲིད་ཇུས་ལག་ཏུ་བསྟར་བ་ཡིས་ལུས་དང་གྲིབ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་འགྲོགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་རྣམས་གར་སོང་ཆ་མེད་དུ་གྱུར་བ་མ་ཟད། ལྷ་པའང་མིང་གི་ལྷག་མར་ལུས་ཏེ་རེབ་གོང་ཡུལ་སྟོང་སིང་ངེར་སོང་ལ། ལྷག་པར་དུ་རིག་གསར་གྱི་འགོ་ཚུགས་པ་ནས་ལྷ་ཀླུ་གཞི་བདག་མ་ཟད་ཆོས་ལུགས་དང་རིག་གནས་གཞན་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་གནོད་པ་ཚབས་ཆེན་ཐེབས་ཏེ་ལོ་ངོ་

ཚིག་སྡོང་ལྷུག་ལ་དར་བའི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཆོས་ལུགས་དང་། དེ་ལས་ཀྱང་ལོ་རྒྱུས་རིང་བའི་ལྷ་དང་ལྷ་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱང་མི་མང་གིས་མི་འདོར་ཐབས་མེད་གྱུར།

ཡིན་ཡང་བོད་མི་རིགས་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཆོས་ལུགས་ཀྱི་བདག་པོ་ལྷ་བུ་དང་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་ཆུ་རྒྱུན་རིང་མོའི་ཁྲོད་ཡལ་ཐབས་མེད་པའི་ཤུགས་རྐྱེན་ཟབ་མོ་བཞག་ཡོད་པས། ཕྱི་རུ་བཙན་གྱིས་བཀག་ཀྱང་ནང་སེམས་སུ་ནམ་ཡང་དོར་མ་སྨྱོང་བ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དམིགས་བསལ་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་དུས་སྐབས་དེར་རེབ་གོང་མི་མང་གིས་དྲུག་པའི་ཀླུ་རོལ་དང་ལོ་གསར་སོགས་དུས་ཆེན་རྣམས་སུ་གསང་སྟབས་ཀྱིས་ཐབ་བསང་སོགས་ཕུལ་ནས་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་ལ་སྐྱབས་བཙོལ་བ་ཡིན།

ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་རྣམས་ཀྱི་མགོན་ཁང་དང་ལབ་ཙེ་སོགས་ལ་གཏོར་བཤིག་ཐེབས་ནས་འཁོར་སའི་གནས་མེད་པར་རི་ཞིག་གར་འགྲོ་ངེས་མེད་དུ་གྱུར་ལ། འཇིག་རྟེན་པའི་ལྷ་འདི་དག་ཡི་དྭགས་ཀྱི་རིགས་སུ་གཏོགས་པས་དྲི་ཟ་བ་ཡིན་ཕྱིར། བསང་དུད་བསྣོགས་ནས་མི་མེད་ལུང་སྟོང་དུ་གནས་པའི་འབྲོག་ཁྲིམ་རེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་དཀར་བསང་དམར་བསང་ཕུལ་བ་ལ་རེ་ནས་དེའི་ཕྱོགས་སུ་འཁོར་བ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན། ༡༩༥༣_༡༩༧༡ ལོའི་བར་བདག་གི་ཕ་མ་གཉིས་ཚོ་བའི་དགོས་མཁོ་བཞིན་ལྟང་ལུང་འབྲོག་ལ་སོང་ནས་ཕྱུགས་ལས་གཉེར་དུས་ནམ་རྒྱུན་རི་མཐོ་ས་དང་གནས་ཁམས་ཅན་དུ་བསང་ཕུལ་ནས་བོས་ན་རེབ

གོང་འཕྲང་ཡར་ནང་གི་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་ཕལ་ཆེར་འཁོར་བ་དང་། བདག་གི་ཁྲིམ་ལ་དོན་ཆེ་མ་ཆུང་གསུམ་ཐེ་འདྲ་བྱུང་ཡང་ཐམས་ཅད་ཁོང་ཆོས་འཁུར་དུ་བཞེས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན། སོ་ནག་ལྷ་པ་ལྷ་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་ཕྱུགས་ལས་ལ་དོན་ཞིག་བྱུང་ཆེ་ལྷ་རང་འབབ་བརྒྱབ་ནས་སྨྲ་རོག་རོག་ཅན་ལ་འགྲོ་དགོས་ཞེས་སྨྱུར་སྐབས་ཀྱིས་བྱོན་ནས་དོན་བྱེད་པ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། དོན་མི་འདྲ་བར་དམིགས་ཏེ་ལྷ་མི་འདྲ་བ་བབས་ནས་བསྒྲུབ་པ་སྟེ། ཨ་མྱེས་ཤེས་བྲག་བབས་ནས་བདག་གི་ཕུ་བོའི་ནད་སངས་པར་བྱས་པ་དང་། སེང་གེ་དཀར་མོ་གདོང་ཅན་བབས་ནས་གཡང་མོ་ལུག་ཅིག་རི་སྤྱང་སྤྱོན་མོས་འགྲོ་བཟས་བྱས་པར་བརྗོད་པ། སྐྱེས་ལྷ་དགྲ་འདུལ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རྨོག་རྒོད་བྱིས་པ་གཅིག་ཏུ་སྤྲུལ་ནས་ལྷུང་ལུང་འབྲོག་པའི་རྩྭ་ས་ནས་ཟོག་ཕྱིར་དེད་ཡོད་ལྟ་བུའོ།

གཞན་ཡང་གནས་ཡུལ་གྱི་ཆ་ནས་རེབ་གོང་ལྷུང་སྐྱའི་ལྷ་པ ༡༩༤༩ ཡས་མས་སུ་ཐོག་མར་འབབ་དུས་ལོ་འདི་དག་གི་རིང་ལ་བྱུང་ཕྱོགས་ཤམ་བྲ་ལར་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་བསྟན་པ་སྐྱོང་དུ་སོང་བར་བཤད་ལ། ལོ་མང་པོར་ལྷ་མི་ངོ་མ་འཕྲོད་པར་གནས་མེད་མཆོད་མེད་ཀྱི་གནས་སུ་ལྷུང་ནས་སྡུག་སྨྱངས་པ་བརྗོད་དེ་མིག་ཆུའང་ལྷུང་མྱོང་།

དུས་དེར་ད་ལྷ་མེད་པའི་ཨ་མྱེས་རྒྱལ་རྫེའམ་དགྲ་ལྷ་རྫེ་རྒྱལ་དང་། གླིང་གེ་སར་རྒྱལ་པོའི་བཙིབས་པ་ཏ་རྐྱང་ངེ། ཨ་མྱེས་ཁྲ་རྒན་སོགས་ཀྱང་ཕྱུགས་ལས་སུ་ཕེབས་ནས་འགྲོ་བའི་དོན་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན། སྤྱིར་བཤད་ཚུལ་ལ་འགྲོ་བ་མིའི་རིགས་དང་སངས་རྒྱས་ཆོས་ལུགས་ལ་གནོད་པ་ཚབས་ཆེན་ཕེབས་དུས་མ་གཏོགས་མི་འབབ་པས་ད་ལྷ་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ཟེར། གང་ལྟར་ཀྱང་དུས་སྐབས་དེར་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་གི་གནས་ཡུལ་ནི་སྔར་གཏན་འཁེལ་གྱི་སྡེ་བ་མིན་པར་ཁོང་ཚོར་མཆོད་མཁན་གྱི་ཡུལ་ཕྱོགས་དེ་ཡིན་པ་གདོན་མི་ཟའོ།

སྐབས་དེར་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་ལ་མཆོད་མཁན་མེད་པས་ཁོང་ཚོ་བཀྲེས་སྐོམ་གྱིས་མནར་བའི་དུས་ཀྱང་ཡོད་པར་འདོད་དེ། དཔེར་ན། ལྷ་པ་ལྷ་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ཨ་མྱེས་བྲག་དཀར་བབས་ནས་བདག་གི་ཕ་ལ་གལ་ཏེ་བསང་ཕུལ་རྒྱུ་བརྗེད་སོང་ན་ཟས་ལ་སོ་བཏབ་པའི་འཕྲོ་ལྟག་ཡིན་ཡང་བསང་ལ་དྲངས་ན་ཆོག་གསུངས་པ་དང་། ཐེངས་ཤིག་བདག་གི་ཨ་མས་བསང་ཕུལ་ནས་ཨ་ཁུ་དཔོན་གྱིས་བསྙེན་པའི་མགར་རྫེ་ཤ་ཟ་རྟོར་མོ་མཆོད་པ་ན། མཚན་ཞིག་རྨི་ལམ་དུ་མགར་རྫེ་སྒྲོན་མཚོས་དྲིན་ཆེན་མ་ད་ལྟ་ཁྲོད་ཀྱི་དགའ་ཞིག་མེད་ཅེས་བཤད་པ་རྨིས། ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་དང་ཆོས་སྐྱོང་སྲུང་མ་གང་ཡིན་ཡང་རང་ལ་དད་མོས་དྲག་ལ་གསོལ་མཆོད་བྱེད་པའི་སྐྱེས་བུའམ་སྐྱེས་མ་དེར་སྡེ་བའམ་ཡུལ་དེའི་ཕོ་མོ་ཡ་རབས་བརྟན་ཚུགས་པ་གང་རུང་གི་གཟུགས་སུ་སྤྲུལ་ནས་ལུང་སྟོན་པ་ཡིན།

ལྷ་མེད་འདྲེ་མེད་ཀྱི་སྲིད་ཇུས་ལག་ཏུ་བསྟར་བཞིན་ཡོད་ཀྱང་རེབ་གོང་རོང་ཁུལ་ས་ཆ་ཁ་ཤས་སུ་ལྷ་པའི་ལས་བགྱིས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན། ༡༩༦༥ ལོར་རྩེ་ཁོག་ན་ཡོད་པའི་སོ་ནག་བསང་བདག་གི་སྐུན་ཞིག་ཚ་འདམ་བཙོན་ཁང་ནས་འདས་པ་དེ་ལྷ་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ལུས་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ནས་རྒྱུན་པར་བསང་བདག་ཚང་ལ་ཡོང་བའི་རྗེས་སུ་ཨ་ལགས་མཁན་ཆེན་ཚང་ལ་ཞུས་ནས་ལྷ་སྒོ་ཕྱེས་ཏེ། ལྷ་སྣ་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་མགྲིན་ཚབ་པར་གྱུར་ནས་འགྲོ་བའི་མཛད་མཁན་ལྷ་པ་ལྷ་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ཞེས་ཡོངས་སུ་གྲགས། ལྷ་དེའི་མིང་ལ་སེང་གེ་དཀར་མོ་གདོང་ཅན་དུ་གསོལ་ནས་སོ་ནག་རོང་གི་སང་གེ་གཡང་རིས་ལ་གནས་སུ་བཅུག

མདོར་ན། ༡༩༧༨ ལོའི་རྗེས་ནས་བཟུང་ལྷ་དང་ལྷ་པ་གང་གིས་སྔོན་ཆད་བཞིན་སྡེ་བའམ་ཡུལ་ཕྱོགས་སྤྱི་ལ་མགོན་སྐྱབས་མཛད་པ་ཞིག་མ་ཡིན་པར། དད་མོས་བྱེད་མཁན་རེ་གཉིས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་དེ་དག་གི་དོན་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཡིན། དེ་ཡང་འཇིག་རྟེན་པའི་ལྷ་འདི་ཉེ་རིང་ཆགས་སྡང་དང་ཕྱོགས་རིས་ཅན་ཡིན་པ་དང་། དགའ་སྐྱོ་ཆགས་སྡང་མངོན་དུ་གསལ་ཡང་སྐབས་འདིར་ཕྱི་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་གནོན་ཤུགས་ཐེབས་པའི་རྐྱེན་གྱིས་དད་མཁན་དང་མཆོད་མཁན་མི་བསྙིགས་ཐབས་མེད་དོ།

གསུམ་པ། དུས་རབས ༢༠ བའི་ལོ་རབས ༨༠ ནས་ད་ལྟ་བར་གྱི་ལྷ་པ།

༡༩༧༨ ལོར་རིག་གསར་མཇུག་སྡོགས་ཡང་དེའི་ཤུགས་རྐྱེན་གྱིས་ལོ་ཁ་ཤས་རིང་ལྷ་དང་ལྷ་པའི་དད་མོས་སླར་གསོ་བྱེད་མ་ཐུབ་ཅིང་། ལོ་རབས ༨༠ འགོ་ནས་བཟུང་རེབ་གོང་ཡུལ་དུ་ཆོས་སྒྲོ་རིམ་གྱིས་ཕྱེས་ནས་དད་མོས་ལ་རང་དབང་ཡོད་པར་གྱུར་བ་དང་། རེབ་གོང་སྤྱི་བ་སོ་སོས་ཀྱང་དྲུག་པའི་ཀླུ་རོལ་དང་ལོ་གསར་ལྷ་རྩེད་སླར་གསོ་བྱས་ཀྱང་ལྷ་པ་མེད་པར་སྐྱེས་པ་ལྟ་སྒྱོད་ཅན་ཞིག་གིས་ཚབ་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན།

དེ་ནས་རིམ་བཞིན་ཆོས་ལུགས་དད་མོས་དང་དུས་ཆེན་གྱི་དགའ་སྟོན་སོགས་རྒྱུན་ལྡན་ཅན་དུ་གྱུར་བ་ན། རེབ་གོང་ཡུལ་དུའང་ས་དཀྱིལ་ལྷ་ཀུན་དང་། ཆུ་སྐྱེས་ལྷ་པ། ཐེ་བུའི་ལྷ་པ། གླིང་རྒྱའི་ལྷ་པ་སོགས་སྔོན་ཆད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་པ་བསྐྱར་དུ་བབས་པ་དང་། ལྕང་སྐྱའི་ལྷ་པ་དང་སོག་རུའི་ལྷ་པ། ས་དཀྱིལ་དང་ཐེ་བུའི་ལྷ་གསར། ཀོཙུ་སྤེའི་ལྷ་པ་བཅས་གསར་དུ་ཕབ་པའི་ལྷ་པའང་མང་དུ་བྱུང་ནས། སྤྱི་བ་སོ་སོའི་ལས་དོན་སྒྲུབ་བཞིན་ཡོད།

ད་ལྟའི་རེབ་གོང་ཡུལ་གྱི་ལྷ་པ་འདི་དག་གིས་སྔོན་ཆད་དང་འདྲ་བར་མིའི་ན་ཚ་དང་ཕྱུགས་ཀྱི་གོད་ཁ། ཆར་ཆུ་དང་རྐྱ་འཕྲོག་གི་གནོད་པ་སོགས་འགོག་པ་མ་ཟད། སྤྱི་བའི་ཁ་འཛིན་འགོ་འཛིན་བྱེད་ཀྱང་སྔོན་ཆད་དང་འདྲ་བར་ཡོད་ཚད་

ཁོང་ཚོའི་འདོད་བློ་དང་བསྟུན་པ་མིན། སྤྱི་ཚོགས་དཔལ་འབྱོར་དང་རིག་གནས། བསམ་བློ་བཅས་གོང་དུ་འཕེལ་བ་དང་བསྟུན་ནས་མི་མང་གིས་རྨོངས་དད་ཁོ་ན་མི་བྱེད་པར་རིགས་པའི་དད་པར་བསྒྱུར་ཏེ་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་འཕེལ་རྒྱས་ ཀྱི་སྒྲུལ་ཤུགས་མིའི་རིགས་རང་ཉིད་ལས་ལྷ་མིན་པ་ཤེས་རྟོགས་བྱུང་ཡོད།

གོང་གི་གནས་ཚུལ་དང་བསྟུན་ནས་ལྷ་པ་ལའང་སྔོན་ཆད་ལས་འགྱུར་ལྡོག་བྱུང་ཡོད་དེ། སྔོན་སེམས་ཅན་བསད་ནས་དམར་མཆོད་བྱེད་པའི་ལུགས་སྲོལ་བསྒྱུར་བ་ནི་སོག་རྟུའི་ལྷ་པས་དྲུག་པའི་ཀླུ་རོལ་སྐབས་ར་ལུག་གསོན་བསྲེག་བྱེད་པ་བསྒྱུར་ནས་ཚེ་ཐར་དུ་བཏང་བ་དང་། དེའི་ཚབ་ཏུ་རྩམ་ར་བསང་དུ་མཆོད་པ་ཡིན། དམར་བསང་མེད་པར་བྱས་པ་ནི་ལྷུང་སྐྱའི་ལྷ་པས་དཀར་བསང་ལས་དམར་བསང་མེད་པ་བྱས་པ་ལྟ་བུ།

སྔོན་ཆད་ལྷ་པས་ལོག་ལམ་དུ་འགྲོ་མཁན་ལ་རྒྱུན་པར་སློབ་གསོ་བཏང་ནས་ལས་གང་ཞིག་བསྒྲུབ་ཀྱང་མི་མང་གི་འདོད་བློ་དང་མཐུན་ཞིང་། སེམས་ཅན་སྐྱེ་འགྲོ་ཀུན་ལ་མི་གནོད་པར་བྱ་བར་འདོམས་པ་མ་ཟད། ཐལ་དྲགས་ན་གནོད་སྐྱོན་ཚབས་ཆེན་བཟོ་བའམ་སྲོག་ཆད་གཅོད་པའང་ཡོད། ད་ལྟ་དེ་ལས་ལྡོག་སྟེ་བསླབ་བྱ་གཏོང་བ་དང་སྡིག་ལམ་འཛོག་པ་ལས་གནོད་པ་མི་སྐྱེལ་བ་ཡིན།

ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་རྣམས་ཀྱང་མི་དང་འདྲ་བར་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་འཕེལ་རྒྱས་དང་བསྟུན་ནས་གང་ལ་ཅི་མཁོ་བྱེད་པ་སྟེ། རང་བྱུང་ཁོར་ཡུག་ལ་སྲུང་སྐྱོབ་དང་སྐྱེ་དངོས་གནས་ལུགས་དོ་མཉམ་ཡོང་ཆེད་ཁོང་གིས་ནམ་ཡང་རྩྭ་ས་མི་བརླག་པ་དང་སྡོང་པོ་མི་གཅོད་པའི་མནའ་བསྐྱགས་སྐྱོང་། ད་དུང་སྐྱེ་བའི་གནས་ཚུལ་དངོས་ལ་གཞིགས་ནས་འགོ་ཁྲིད་དང་ཕན་ཚུན་ཟུང་དུ་འབྲེལ་ཏེ་སྒྲིག་ལམ་གསར་བ་འཇོག་པ་མ་ཟད། ཁོང་ཚོ་དངོས་སུ་འཚོ་བའི་གཏིང་རིམ་ལ་ཞུགས་ནས་ཐག་བཅད་པའི་དོན་ཡང་ཧ་ཅང་མང་།

སྐབས་རེར་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་གི་དྲག་པོ་མངོན་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ལས་ལ་སྤྲོ་བ་དང་ཉེ་རིང་ཆགས་སྡང་གི་རང་གཤིས་མངོན་དུ་གསལ་བ་སྟེ། ལྷུང་སྐྱུ་དང་ལྷུང་ལུང་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་རྩྭ་ས་རྩོད་དུས། ལྷུང་སྐྱུའི་ལྷ་པས་བསླབ་བྱ་གཏོང་རྒྱུ་ཕར་ཞོག་ཁོང་ལ་དམག་བཀོད་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་པར་ཨ་ཚུགས་ཀྱིས་དམག་སྣ་དྲངས་ནས་རྒྱུགས་གྲབས་བྱས་པ་ཨ་ལགས་དཔལ་ལྡན་གྱིས་བཀག་པ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། ལྷ་པས་ལྷ་གསོལ་བསང་གཏོང་ལ་དགའ་བའི་རྐྱ་འཁྲོག་མཁན་རྣམས་ལ་བཀག་འགོག་ལས་རྒྱབ་སྐྱོར་བྱས་ཏེ་ལས་དོན་ཡིད་བཞིན་དུ་འགྲུབ་པའང་ཡོད།

ལྷ་པར་དད་མོས་ཀྱི་ཆ་ནས། སྔོན་ཆད་དང་མི་འདྲ་བར་དད་མི་དད་གཉིས་ཡོད་པ་དང་། དད་མིན་ཡང་ལྷའི་བཟང་ངན་གྱིས་འཇོག་པ་མིན་པར་དེའི་མགྲིན་ཚབ་པ་ལྷ་པའམ་ཐུང་རི་ཡིན་པའི་སྐྱེས་པ་དེར་རག་ལས་པ་ཡིན། སྐྱེས་

པ་དེ་གཡོ་སྒྱུ་ཁྲམ་གསུམ་འཛོམས་ལ་ཅི་བྱེད་ལ་གནས་མེད་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ན་དེར་བཀུར་བརྗོ་དང་དད་མོས་མི་ཐོབ་ལ། སྐྱེས་བུ་ཡ་རབས་གཞུང་དྲང་ཞིག་ཡིན་ན་བཀུར་བརྗོ་དང་དད་མོས་ཐོབ་པ་མ་ཟད། ལྷ་པར་ཤ་གཉེན་ཉེའམ་མི་རྙིང་ཡོད་མེད་ལའང་རག་ལས་ཆེན་པོ་ཡོད།

མདོར་ན། ཆོས་ལུགས་དད་མོས་རང་དབང་གི་སྲིད་ཇུས་ལག་ཏུ་བསྟར་བ་ནས་བཟུང་རིམ་གྱིས་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་གི་གནས་ཡུལ་ངེས་གཏན་དང་ལྷ་པ་འཐུས་ཚང་དུ་འགྲོ་བཞིན་པ་མ་ཟད། ལྷ་དང་ལྷ་པ་ལའང་ཡུལ་དུས་དང་མཐུན་པའི་འཕེལ་རྒྱས་མི་དམན་པ་བྱུང་ཡོད་ལ། རྒྱ་ཆེ་བའི་མི་དམངས་མང་ཚོགས་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་མེད་དུ་མི་རུང་བའི་ཚེ་མ་གཏོགས་སྔོན་ཆད་བྱ་བྱེད་ཅི་རིགས་ལ་ཁ་ལོ་བསྒྱུར་མཁན་དུ་མཐོང་གིན་མེད་དོ།

གསུམ། ལྷ་པའི་ཆོ་ག་སྐོར་ཞིག་བཤད་པ།

དང་པོ། ལྷ་པ་བཙལ་སྟངས།

ལྷ་པ་བཙལ་སྟངས་ལ་སྣ་ཚོགས་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། གལ་ཏེ་སྡེ་བ་དེར་ལྷ་རྒྱུད་མེད་པར་གསར་དུ་བཙལ་དགོས་ན། ལྷ་དང་བླ་མར་ལུང་བསྟན་ཞུས་ཏེ་ལོ་ཐག་བཅད་པར་འདུ་བའི་སྐྱེས་པ་ཡོངས་རྫོགས་སྡེ་བ་གཞུང་གི་འདུ་ཁང་ནས་ཕྱིར་ཁྱིམ་དུ་

ལོག་མི་ཆོག་པར་གཙང་མ་བྱས་ཏེ་ཉིན་འགའི་རིང་ལ་བླ་མའི་ལུང་བསྟན་བཞིན་རིམ་གྲོ་བྱ་དགོས་ལ། ཉིན་དུ་མའི་རྗེས་ནས་མི་ཁ་ཤས་ཀྱི་ལུས་ཕུང་མི་བདེ་བ་དང་མགོ་ན་བ། སྡོད་མི་ཚུགས་པ། འདར་སྤྲུགས་རྒྱག་པ་བཅས་ཀྱི་མཚན་མ་བྱུང་ན་ད་གཟེར་དེ་དག་ལས་རྟགས་དྲག་པོ་ཐོན་པ་བླ་མར་གཏུགས་ནས་འདེམས་པ་ཡིན། དཔེར་ན། སོག་རུའི་ལྷ་པ་བཙལ་སྐབས་ཉིན་འགར་བླ་མའི་གསུང་བཞིན་རྟ་མགྲིན་བཏོན་པ་དང་མཐར་ཐུང་རི་གཉིས་བྱུང་བ་ཡིན།

སྔེ་བ་དེར་ལྷ་རྒྱུད་ཡོད་པའི་དབང་དུ་བཏང་ན། མི་རྒྱུད་དེ་ལས་བཙལ་བའམ་ཡང་ན་རང་འབབ་རྒྱག་པའང་ཡོད་དེ། ལྷང་སྐྱའི་ལྷ་པ་ནི་ཁོང་ཚང་ལྷ་རྒྱུད་ཡིན་པ་དང་རིམ་གྲོ་ཅི་ཡང་མ་བསྒྲུབ་པར་རང་འབབ་བརྒྱབ་ནས་ཡོང་བ་ཡིན་ལ། ཕྱིས་སུ་བླ་མར་གཏུགས་ནས་ལྷ་སྒོ་དང་ངག་སྒོ་ཕྱེས་པ་ཡིན།

གཞན་ཡང་སྐྱེས་བུ་དྲག་པོ་འདས་ཆེ་གཞི་བདག་གི་འཁོར་ནས་སྐྱེས་ཏེ་མིའི་ལུས་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ནས་ལྷ་སྒོ་ཕྱེས་པའང་ཡོད་དེ་སོ་ནག་ལྷ་པ་ལྷ་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་སེང་གེ་དཀར་མོ་གདོང་ཅན་འབབ་པ་གོང་དུ་བརྗོད་ཟིན།

ལྷ་པ་ཐོག་མར་ཕབ་སྐབས་བླ་མར་བསྟེན་རྒྱུ་ཤིན་ཏུ་གལ་ཆེ་སྟེ། གལ་ཏེ་བླ་མར་མ་བསྟེན་པར་ལྷ་བབས་ན་ལྷ་འདྲེ་གང་རུང་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ནས་སེམས་ཅན་ལ་གནོད་ཅིང་འཚེ་ལ། བླ་མས་ལྷ་སྒོ་ཕྱེས་ཆེ་གཏན་འཁེལ་གྱི་ལྷ་ལས་འདྲེ་གདོན་སོགས་ཞུགས་མི་ཐུབ་པ་དང་། མ་འོངས་པའི་བྱ་བྱེད་ཅི་རིགས་བླ་མ

བཞིན་བསྒྲུབ་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྤུར་སོག་རྩའི་ལྷ་པ་ཨ་མྱེས་དགྲ་འདུལ་བབས་ཚེ་སྟག་ལུང་རི་ཁྲོད་པའི་བཀའ་བསྒོས་ཉེར་གཏད་ཟེར་བ་དང་། ལྟུང་སྐྱའི་ལྷ་པས་བླ་མ་ལྷོ་བྲག་ཚང་གི་བཀའ་བསྒོས་ཉེར་གཏད་ཟེར་བ་ཡིན། རྩང་ཡུན་རིང་བོ་འགོར་ཚེ་དགོས་མཁོའི་དབང་གིས་ལྷ་པ་གཅིག་ལྷ་དུ་མར་འབབ་པའི་དཔེ་ཡོད།

དེ་ལྟར་ལྷ་སྒོ་ཕྱེས་པ་ནས་བཟུང་གྲིབ་ཕོག་པའི་བྱ་བ་ཅི་ཡང་མི་བགྱི་བ་སྟེ། དཔེར་ན་བཤམ་པོ་སོགས་མི་འཁྱུར་བ་དང་། དྲུག་པའི་ཀླུ་རོལ་དང་ལོ་གསར་དུས་ཆེན་སྐབས་སུ་ལུས་གཙང་མ་བྱེད་པ་དང་ཁ་ཟས་ལ་དམིགས་བསལ་གྱི་བཀོད་སྒྲིག་ཡོད།

གཉིས་པ། ལྷ་པའི་ལྷ་སྐད་དང་ཕྱག་རྒྱ།

ཐོག་མར་ལྷ་སྒོ་ཕྱེས་མ་ཐག་ནས་ལྷ་སྐད་གསུངས་པ་ཞིག་མིན་པར། དེའི་རྗེས་སུ་རིམ་གྱིས་བླ་མར་གཏུགས་ནས་ངག་སྒོ་འབྱེད་པ་ཡིན། ངག་སྒོ་ཕྱེས་རྗེས་ལྷ་དྲག་པོ་ཡིན་ན་དྲག་པོའི་ཚུལ་དང་ཞི་བ་ཡིན་ན་ཞི་བའི་ཚུལ་ཡིན་ལ། ལྷ་མང་ཆེ་བས་མིའི་སྐད་ཆ་དང་མཐུན་པའི་ལྷ་སྐད་གསུངས་པ་ཡིན། ལ་ལས་མགོ་མཇུག་བར་གསུམ་དུ་གཏམ་དཔེ་ཁོན་སྦྲར་ནས་གསུངས་པ་དང་། ཨ་མྱེས་རྒྱལ་རྩེ་ལྟ་བུས་ལྷ་སྐད་གླུ་རུ་ལེན་པ་དག་ལ་མི་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་དཔྱད་པ་བཏང་ནས་

འགྲེལ་དགོས། ལྷ་སྐད་འདི་ཡང་བྲིས་པས་སྐད་སྦྲུངས་པ་དང་འདྲ་བར་ཐོག་མར་མི་གསལ་བ་དང་རིམ་གྱིས་ཇེ་གསལ་དང་ཇེ་མྱུར་དུ་འགྱུར་ལ། བྱང་ཆེ་མིས་ཁ་བརྡ་བྱེད་པ་དང་མཚུངས། ལྷ་སྐད་གསུངས་དུས་མིང་རེ་གཉིས་ལ་གཏན་འཁེལ་གྱི་བརྡ་ཆད་ཡོད་དེ། ཁྱིམ་ཚང་ལ་གཞི་རྒྱུན་ཕྲ་མོ་ཟེར་བ་དང་། བྲིས་པ་ལ་དཔྱིད་ཟླ་ཕྲ་མོ་ཟེར་བ་ལས་ང་ཚོའི་འབོད་སྟངས་དང་མི་འདྲ་བ་ཡིན།

ལྷ་ཡོད་དོ་ཅོག་གིས་ལྷ་སྐད་གསུངས་པའི་ངེས་པ་མེད་དེ། ལྷ་བཙན་གཉོམ་གྱི་དབང་གིས་བཙན་པོར་ངག་སྒོ་ཕྱེས་ཆེ་མི་རྣམས་ལ་བྱ་བྱེད་ཅི་རིགས་ངོ་རྒྱག་བྱེད་སྲིད་པས། ལྷ་དང་མི། མི་དང་མིའི་བར་གྱི་འབྲེལ་བར་གནོད་འགྲོ་བར་དམིགས་ནས་ངག་སྒོ་མི་འབྱེད་པ་ཡིན་པ་དཔེར་ན། སོག་རུའི་ལྷ་པ་ཆེ་ཆུང་གཉིས་ཀ་ཨ་མྱེས་གློན་པོ་དང་ཨ་མྱེས་དགྲ་འདུལ་འབབ་ཀྱང་ཐུགས་བཙན་དྲག་པས་གླ་མས་ངག་སྒོ་ཕྱེ་མེད།

དེས་ན་ལྷ་དང་མིའི་བར་བརྡ་ཇི་ལྟར་སྤྲོད་དགོས་ཞེ་ན། ལྷ་པའི་ཕྱག་རྒྱར་བརྟེན་དགོས། ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ནི་ལྷ་སྐད་མི་གསུངས་པའི་ལྷ་པ་ཁོ་ནའི་མིན་པར། རྒྱུན་ལྡན་བྱ་བྱེད་སླ་མོ་རྣམས་ལ་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་བཀོལ་བ་ཡིན། ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ལ་སྦྱི་བའི་ནང་མཐུན་པར་བྱེད་པ་ལ་ཕྱག་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ཁུ་ཚུར་བཅིངས་ནས་ཕན་ཚུན་བསྣོལ་བ་དང་། ཆོ་བའི་ནང་མཐུན་པར་བྱེད་པ་ལ་གོང་མཛུབ་དང་དཀྱིལ་མཛུབ་གཉིས་གཤིབ་ནས་ཕན་ཚུན་བསྣོལ་ལ། ཁྱིམ་ཚང་ནང་མཐུན་པར་བྱེད་པ་ལ་གོང་མཛུབ་གཉིས་

ཕན་ཚུན་བསྒྲོལ་བ་ཡིན། གཞན་ཡང་ཇ་ཕུད་དང་ཆང་ཕུད་མཆོད་པ། བསང་ཕུལ་བ། ཀི་སྭོ་སྒྲོག་པ། ཁ་བཏགས་མཁོ་བ། ཤིང་མོ་མཁོ་བ། ལྷ་རྩེད་བྱེད་དགོས་པ་བཅས་ལ་རང་རང་གི་ཁྱད་ཆོས་དང་མཐུན་པའི་ལག་པའི་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་མི་འདྲ་བ་རེ་ཡོད་པ་དེ་དག་ངོས་འཛིན་སླ་བ་དང་། གཏན་འཁེལ་མིན་པའི་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ཡོད་ཚེ་མི་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཧ་མ་གོ་བར་དགོད་བྲོ་བའི་གཏམ་ཡང་བྱུང་སྲོང་།

གསུམ་པ། ལྷ་པའི་ལྷ་ཆས།

ལྷ་པའི་ལྷ་ཆས་ལ་སྟོད་གོས་དང་ལྷམ། ཐང་ག་ཆུང་ངུ (ཙ་ཀ་ཡང་ཟེར་ལ་དེ་ལྷ་པའི་ཁོག་ཏུ་གཞུག་བྱའི་ལྷ་དེའི་སྐུ་པར་ཡིན)། བླ་མས་གནང་བའི་ཕུར་འདུད་དང་སྲུང་འཁོར་བཅས་ཡོད་ཀྱང་། ལྷ་པར་ངེས་པར་དུ་ལྷ་ཆས་ཁ་ཚང་མཁོ་པའི་ངེས་པ་མེད། ལྷ་པ་ལྷ་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ལ་ཙ་ཀ་དང་ཕུར་འདུད་ཀྱིས་ཆོག་པ་དང་། མགར་རྩེ་ལྷ་པར་སྟོད་གོས་མཁོ། ལྕང་སྐྱའི་ལྷ་པར་དུས་ཆེན་གྱི་སྐབས་སྟོད་གོས་དང་ཙ་ཀ། ཕུར་འདུད། ལྷམ་བཅས་ཚང་དགོས་ཀྱང་། སྐབས་གཞན་དུ་ལྷ་ཆས་མེད་ཀྱང་འབབ་ཐུབ། འདིར་གསལ་བཤད་དགོས་ པ་ནི། ལྷ་ཆས་མེད་ཚེ་གཞན་ལ་གནོད་ཅིང་འཚེ་བའི་ལྷ་འདྲེ་ནུས་མཐུ་ཅན་ལུས་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ཉེན་ཡོད་པས་ལྷ་དངོས་སུ་ཕབ་སྐབས་དེ་དག་མཁོ་བ་ཡིན།

བཞི་བ། ལྷ་ཕབ་རྩལ།

དྲུག་པའི་ཀླུ་རོལ་དང་ལོ་གསར་དུས་ཆེན་གྱི་སྐབས་སུ་སྡེ་བ་གཞུང་གིས་ཕབ་པའམ་ཡང་ན་གནོད་པ་སེལ་ཆེད་ཁྲིམ་ཚང་གིས་ཕབ་དུས། ཐོག་མར་ལྷ་ཚས་ལུས་ལ་གསོལ་བདང་། བསང་ཕུལ་བསང་དཔེ་བརྗོན། ཤུག་བདུག་བྲེད་པ་མ་ཟད། སྐབས་འགར་ལྷ་པ་རང་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་བླ་མའི་གསོལ་འདེབས་བརྗོན་ན་ད་གཟོད་འབབ་ངེས། ལྷ་གསར་ཡིན་ཚེ་ཅུང་འབབ་དཀའ་ཡང་། ཅུང་བྱུང་བའི་ལྷ་པ་ཏ་ཅང་འབབ་སླ་བས་བབས་ཡོད་མེད་མི་ཤེས་པའི་གནས་རྩལ་ཡང་ཡོདལྷ་བབས་ཚེ་ལྷའི་ཞི་དྲག་གི་དབང་གིས་ཞལ་ལའང་ཞི་དྲག་གི་ཉམས་ཐོན་པ་ཡིན།

ཨ་མྱེས་རྒྱལ་རྩེ་ལྷ་བུར་མཆོན་ན་བསང་ཕུལ་པ་ལས་གཞན་སྒྲུང་བཤད་དགོས་པ་དང་། ལྷག་པར་དུ་ཨ་མྱེས་རྒྱལ་རྩེ་ཨ་ཁུ་ཁྲོ་ཐུང་གིས་བསྒྲོངས་པའི་སྐོར་བཤད་ཚེ་སྨྱུར་དུ་འབབ་པ་ཡིན། གལ་ཏེ་ལྷ་པ་བྱུང་མ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ཚེ་མི་མང་ཚོགས་སར་འུར་སྒྲ་ཆེ་བའམ་ཡང་ན་མི་མང་གིས་བསང་ཕུལ་ནས་ཀི་སྒྲ་སྒྲོག་སར་སོང་ཀྱང་རང་འབབ་རྒྱུག་སྲིད་པ་ཡིན།

བཞི། ལྷ་པར་འཛིན་འོས་པའི་ཀུན་སློང་།

སྲོལ་རྒྱུན་གྱི་དད་མོས་ལུགས་སྲོལ་དེ་ད་ལྟ་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་འཚོ་བར་ཁྱབ་ཡོད་པ་ལས་བོད་མི་རིགས་བསམ་བློ་སྙིང་བའི་བཀག་རྒྱ་ལས་ཐར་མེད་པ་མཚོན་པ་དང་། ཁོ་

ཆོས་ལྷ་པས་ཡུལ་ངེས་ཅན་ལ་ཐོན་པའི་ནུས་པ་ཡ་མཚན་དུ་བཟུང་ནས་སྤྱིའམ་རྩ་བར་མི་སེམས་པར་བྱེ་བྲག་ལ་འབད་པ་ནི་བསམ་བློའི་སྟེང་གི་བཀག་རྒྱ་ཆེན་པོ་ཞིག་ཡིན་པ་མཚོན། དེས་ན་ང་ཚོས་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་རྣམས་མིའི་ལུས་ཁོག་ཏུ་ཞུགས་ཏེ་ལུང་སྟོན་པའི་ལྷ་པའི་སྐོར་འདི་དག་གནའ་སྔ་མོ་ནས་བྱུང་བའི་ཡུལ་སྲོལ་གོམས་འདྲིས་ཤིག་ཏུ་བཟུང་ནས་དེ་དར་སྤེལ་དང་འཕྲུས་ཚད་དུ་བཏང་སྟེ་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་འཚོ་བའི་ཁྲོད་ཡུན་རིང་གནས་ཐབས་བྱེད་པ་ལས་ལྷ་པའི་བྱ་སྤྱོད་ཡོངས་འགྲོ་བ་མིའི་རིགས་ཀྱི་བསམ་བློའི་འབྱུང་ཁུངས་སམ་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་ལ་ཁ་ལོ་བསྒྱུར་བྱེད་དུ་མཐོང་ན་ཤིན་ཏུ་མི་ལེགས་པས་རྟོག་པ་མཐོ་བའི་ལྷ་དག་ཀྱང་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་འཚོ་བ་དང་མཐུན་པར་འགྲེལ་ན་ལེགས་པར་འདོད་དོ།

དཔྱད་རྩོམ་འདིའི་རྒྱུ་ཆ་བསྡུ་སྐབས་བཅར་འདྲི་བྱས་ཡུལ།

༡།	གཡང་སྐྱབས།	རེབ་གོང་སོག་རུ།	ལོ ༤༠	ཞིང་པ།
༢།	དོན་འགྲུབ།	རེབ་གོང་ལྕང་སྐྱ།	ལོ ༧༣	ཞིང་པ།
༣།	ཀླུ་མོ་སྐྱིད།	རེབ་གོང་ལྕང་སྐྱ།	ལོ ༦༨	ཞིང་པ།
			(དོན་འགྲུབ་ཀྱི་ཆུང་མ)	
༤།	ལྷ་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ།	རེབ་གོང་སོ་ནག	ལོ ༦༣	ཞིང་པ།
			(སྔར་སོ་ནག་ལྷ་པ་ཡིན)	

༥། ཀླུ་བྲུམས་ཚེ་རིང་།	རིབ་གོང་རྒྱལ་པོ།	ལོ ༦༤	ཞིང་པ།
༦། མཁའ་བྲུམས་ཡག	རིབ་གོང་ལྷུང་སྐྱ།	ལོ ༩༣	ཞིང་པ།
༧། ལྷ་མཁར་ཡག	རིབ་གོང་སོག་རྟུ།	ལོ ༤༦	སོག་རྟུའི་སྡེ་དཔོན།
༨། མགོན་པོ་སྐྱབས།	རིབ་གོང་སོ་ནག	ལོ ༤༤	སོ་ནག་སྡེ་དཔོན།

གཞན་སྡེ་བ་སོ་སོའི་འབྲེལ་ཡོད་མི་སྣ་མང་པོར་བཅར་འདྲི་བྱས་ཏེ་རྒྱུ་ཆ་འཐུས་ཚང་སྒྲིག་པ་མ་ཟད། དཔྱད་གཞིའི་ཡིག་ཆའང་གཤམ་གསལ་ལྟར།

༡། «བོད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་འདྲེ་གདོན་བགེགས» (རྒྱ་ཡིག སྟོད་སྨད) པོ་ཅེ་ཁྲུ་བས་ཀེ་ཡིས་བརྩམས། ཞི་ཅིས་ཧྲུན་གྱིས་རྒྱ་ཡིག་ཏུ་བསྒྱུར།

Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Réne De. 1956. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*. The Netherlands: Mouton & Co., Publishers.

༢། «བོད་ཀྱི་རིག་གནས་འཕེལ་བའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས»(རྒྱ་ཡིག སྟོད་སྨད) དོན་འགྲུབ་དབང་འབུམ་གྱིས་བརྩམས།

༣། «ཐ་བཞེད» ཐ་གསལ་སྣང་གིས་བརྩམས།

༤། «ཞང་བོད་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཏི་སེའི་འོད» ནམ་མཁའི་ནོར་བུས་བརྩམས།

༥། «བོད་ཀྱི་ཆོས་སྲིད་ཟུང་འབྲེལ་གྱི་ལམ་ལུགས་སྐོར་བཤད་པ» དུང་དཀར་བློ་བཟང་འཕྲིན་ལས་ཀྱིས་མཛད།

༦། «མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཡེ་ཤེས་མཚོ་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རྣམ་ཐར་གཏེར་མ»

SIGNS OF TRANSITION: ON INTERPRETING SOME PREDICTORS OF *SPRUL SKU* REBIRTH

MARCIA S. CALKOWSKI

Signs and wonders are integral to Tibetan narratives recounting the birth and early childhood of *sprul sku* (reincarnated lamas). Oral accounts of these events highlight portents (*rtags mtshan*)[1] that may mark a *sprul sku*'s emergence as distinctive from ordinary beings, but perhaps not so distinctive from other *sprul sku*. Such portents include unusual meteorological phenomena, extraordinary geological phenomena, parents' or relatives' dreams of interactions with exalted religious persons or objects, embodied signs, crop and/or animal infertility in the vicinity of the *sprul sku*'s birthplace, and misfortunes afflicting the *sprul sku*'s natal family.[2] Since these signs are often initially identified by non-religious specialists living in close proximity to prospective *sprul sku*, wider recognition of these signs may effectively incorporate a prospective *sprul sku*'s immediate family and neighbours into the rank of divinatory agents in a *sprul sku* search process. My main concern in this article is to show how such local agency is constructed when portents precipitate or inspire social practices, which, in turn, may serve as signs of legitimation within the popular, if not the official, Tibetan purview. Using excerpts from narrative accounts of the birth and early childhood of *sprul sku*s and *sprul sku* candidates I collected in India and Nepal,[3] I begin with an overview of the nature of these portents and then turn to social practices associated with the reception of these portents.

I would roughly characterise portents observed prior to or within a year or so following the birth of a *sprul sku* in terms of three general categories: environmental or atmospheric phenomena which may or

[1] My informants referred to these portents as *rtags mtshan*. Mills (2003: 284) utilises the more doctrinally prevalent term *rten 'brel*.

[2] French (1995) observes that the birth of a reincarnate lama was often associated with natural disasters such as famine, earthquakes, and disease.

[3] Research for this article was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Wenner Gren Foundation.

may not be perceived in dreams; dreamed or envisioned encounters with lamas, religious objects, or mysterious beings; and signs of a Buddha nature embodied in infants. Another category of portents might be labeled ‘misfortunes befalling a *sprul sku*’s family or local community’; however, misfortunes are not so indexical of a *sprul sku*’s birth as are other portents and, according to the accounts I collected, are typically identified retrospectively after the formal recognition of a *sprul sku*. Also, for my present purposes, I am not attending to the prescient speech or activities of young *sprul sku* candidates, a subject I consider elsewhere.[4] Examples of environmental and atmospheric phenomena include rainbows, dramatic thunderstorms, the emergence of trees and an abundant crop in a sparsely vegetated area, potatoes growing on trees, or a second flowering of apricot trees within the same season. These phenomena suggest dramatic disruptions or transformations of space, and, in the case of the apricot trees, of time, which is consistent with an observation Skyabs rje yongs ’dzin khri byang rin po che’s attendant made to me that a rainbow is a disruption of astral elements.[5] Examples of dreams or visions of religious persons or objects include parents’ dreams of interactions with lamas, mothers’ dreams of receiving special gifts from lamas, dreams of elephants approaching households where boys have recently taken birth, magnified manifestations of important lamas, and apparitions in the shape of large mysterious men. Such dreams and visions are widely understood as suggesting that the household is receiving a very auspicious message or an unusual and important being. Signs of a Buddha nature embodied in infants include the appearance of the letter ‘Ah’ on an infant’s tongue or a callus on his forehead. The significance of embodied signs is, perhaps, the most transparent.

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[4] I take up a discussion of these actions in a manuscript I am preparing for publication entitled *Refugee Souls: The Recognition of Reincarnate Lamas in the Tibetan Exile Community.*

[5] Mills (2003: 289) has advanced the interesting thesis that unlike ordinary Ladakhis and Tibetans, whose personhood is “*embedded* within the chthonic landscape by ones of agency that link them to particular places and tellurian deities”, the *sprul sku*’s social identity is constructed “in the terms of processes of [the] ritual subjugation” of these places and deities. Thus, he argues, ominous portents such as natural disasters associated with the coming birth of a *sprul sku* may be understood as disrupting “an established chthonic order” (*ibid.*) in response to the imminent arrival of such a spiritual presence. Whether or not the notion of personhood as being “embedded within the chthonic landscape” is applicable to Tibetan refugees, on whom my research has centered, is a question worth pursuing.

What these three general categories of portents suggest is that a *sprul sku*'s rebirth is marked by transformations of the phenomenal world, oneiric communiqués from exalted persons, or embodied symbols of a Buddha nature, which, in turn, are prime topics for public discourse. These signs are *remarkable* in the fullest sense of the word, which is why they are the referents for the Tibetan adage that 'a talkative mother gives birth to *sprul sku*'. They attract public interest and evoke public discussion, but, what is more, discussing these portents in itself constitutes a strategy which may or may not be intended in the legitimation of *sprul sku*. Here, I use the term 'strategy' in Bourdieu's (1990) sense—that is, not as a "conscious, rational calculation", but rather as the feel for "a particular, historically determined game" (1990: 62–63). A good player of this game must appear to conform with the rules of the game while excelling in improvisations which serve his or her interest; bad players, on the other hand, are less aware that their actions are simultaneously free and constrained. For example, a pregnant woman who was indirectly linked to an important *sprul sku* who had died approximately a year before she had conceived informed me that a lama had assured her that she would be giving birth to a son, and that her dreams had featured a golden temple with a turquoise roof. A few months later, the woman became the target of jokes after she gave birth to a daughter.

SECRECY, *BAR CHAD*, AND RESISTANCE

If serving up one's dreams, visions, or observation of portents for public discussion constitutes a strategy for legitimating a *sprul sku* candidate, what other social practices, which become signs in themselves, might be understood as legitimating strategies? To consider this question, I offer the following excerpts from narrative accounts offered respectively by the brother of Pan chen 'os sprul tsha pag rin po che, Tsha shod rin po che's mother, and Khams sprul rin po che's mother.

Pan chen 'os sprul tsha pag rin po che[6]

Pan chen 'os sprul tsha pag rin po che was born to a nomad family living near Gsang gshung to the northeast of Lhasa. According to his elder brother, before Pan chen 'os sprul's birth in 1939, many signs appeared which their mother wrote down and later offered to the search party that eventually visited the family home. One notable sign the elder brother recalled was that at the time of Rin po che's birth, their house was filled with light as if someone had switched on an electric bulb. Another remarkable indication occurred one day when Rin po che was about one year old and had mastered crawling. Rin po che's grandmother took him outside and left him unattended for a brief time. Near the house were several huge slabs of stone, and Rin po che, crawling over one of them, left a footprint on the slab. When his grandmother returned, she was astonished to see a baby's footprint embedded in what had previously been a smooth stone surface. The family immediately realised that their baby was an extraordinary being, but kept this news secret from others to prevent obstacles (*bar chad*). Since the parents considered the footprint to be very sacred, they kept the stone slab covered with cloth. The parents did not even permit family members to view the footprint directly, but did allow them to touch the cloth with their foreheads (as a gesture of reverence). The family then awaited the arrival of someone who would be able to recognise the identity of the boy.

When a search party seeking the Pan chen Lama happened to cross mountains in the vicinity of the Pan chen 'os sprul's home, the lamas saw the letter 'Ta' written on the snow and found this to be very significant. After inquiring locally, they learned that nomad communities lived on the other side of the mountain and proceeded to the Pan chen 'os sprul's home. There the search party learned that Rin po che's father's name was Rta mgrin. The search party presented several of the former Pan chen Lama's ritual objects along with other objects to the young boy and he chose correctly. When shown a picture of Bkra shis lhun po Monastery, the one-year-old child looked at the picture and pointed to his room. This gesture immediately prompted the lamas to cry since they believed that they had found the right candidate. They told the family to keep the boy clean (*ma shod pa phyed*—'do not let him become dirty') in order to avoid obstacles

[6] This is an excerpt from an interview given me by Pan chen 'os sprul tsha pag rinpoche's elder brother in Bodnath, Nepal, on November 24, 1994.

(*bar chad*), and acknowledged that there was every possibility that the boy was the authentic incarnation of Pan chen rin po che.

Tsha shod rin po che[7]

Tsha shod rin po che, whose name derives from Tsha ba dpa' shod dgon pa in Khams, was born in 1969. According to his mother, her mother, who assisted at his birth, had observed that at that time, a rainbow had appeared amidst the drizzle of rain. When she, her mother, and her baby presented themselves before the late Eighth Khams sprul rin po che of Tashi Jong (Bkra shis ljongs), Himachal Pradesh, India, in order to seek a name for the baby, Khams sprul rin po che told them that the baby must be kept clean (*gtsang ma*), the whole household must be kept clean, and that the baby's mother must be very clean. Although Khams sprul rin po che did not identify her son as a *sprul sku*, she felt that Khams sprul rin po che actually knew her son was a *sprul sku* when he gave her these instructions. She thought that Khams sprul rin po che kept silent as to her son's identity at this time in order to avoid the harm that could befall them should they reveal his *sprul sku* status to others. She mentioned that even her mother had enjoined her not to tell others about any portents or Khams sprul rin po che's instructions.

Discussion

These two excerpts introduce the role of secrecy, which is explicitly linked by the narrators to the deflection of obstacles (*bar chad*). In other accounts I collected, narrators identify obstacles as a sign of the impending birth of a *sprul sku*. *Bar chad* are obstacles that might harm the family, the young *sprul sku*, domestic animals, crops, or obscure the search for a reincarnation. Explanations for obstacles that might precede the birth of a *sprul sku* vary. Some lamas attribute such obstacles to imbalances between the spiritual power of the *sprul sku* and his family, but what precisely is meant by 'spiritual power' may differ from one Buddhist sect to another. Dge lug pa lamas, for example, tend to explain the imbalance in terms of merit (*bsod nam*s). Since *sprul sku* possess more merit than ordinary humans, the birth of a *sprul sku* in a household where the collective level of merit is

[7] This is an excerpt from an interview given me by Tsha shod rin po che's mother in Tashi Jong (Bkra shis ljongs), Himachal Pradesh, India, on July 26, 1992.

relatively low creates a kind of dissonance in that the family is unable to absorb, and thus are overwhelmed by, the *sprul sku*'s merit. One informant held that obstacles are to be expected when *sprul sku* take birth since it is the holiness of the *sprul sku* that attracts these obstacles. Although he found it difficult to account for the appearance of obstacles, he believed that they emerge in reaction to the presence of a *sprul sku* or to the creation of a religious atmosphere through the performance of a religious ritual. According to this logic, the obstacles that were attracted to the *sprul sku*'s spirituality in his (or her) previous lives may be expected to sustain this attraction throughout the *sprul sku*'s present life, and thus need to be deflected. Something must serve as a decoy to enable the *sprul sku* to enter and remain in the world, and these decoys take the form of family members or the means of the family's livelihood. Thus, the family would interpret any mishap befalling a family member or the family's livestock, crops, or business ventures as a sign that the obstacles targeting their *sprul sku* had been distracted by decoys.

However, although obstacles may be deflected to a varying extent, there are cases where they are too powerful and the *sprul sku* dies. When *sprul sku*s are born in human form, they share an ordinary human infant's vulnerability. Obstacles (*bar chad*), which Tibetans sometimes endow with the capability of sentient action, are described as being particularly keen on taking advantage of this vulnerability by harming the *sprul sku* as much as possible during the first twelve years of his life. For these reasons, a *sprul sku*'s family might be expected to perform many rituals to counteract the effects of obstacles. The impact of obstacles on the *sprul sku*'s family is also expected to diminish with the *sprul sku*'s maturation, and the family is expected eventually to experience good fortune and happiness.

In the two excerpts I cited above, however, obstacles are effectively linked to the 'evil eye'—that is, the belief that harm will befall the *sprul sku* and/or his family should the portents gain social recognition. In this way, secrecy can be understood as a strategy ostensibly directed to deflecting obstacles. However, to paraphrase Richard Fardon (1985: 146–47), secrecy may entail ambiguous games, since sudden reticence on the part of a heretofore talkative mother or a family's reluctance to discuss publicly visible portents such as meteorological phenomena or infants' tongues embossed with sacred letters constitutes a strategy for deflecting obstacles, a strategy that is, in turn, an indication of a *sprul sku*'s birth. Furthermore, the widespread practice of consulting lamas for explanations of

extraordinary phenomena ensures that the prescription of secrecy is context dependent.

These two excerpts also introduce the necessity of cleanliness. The injunction to keep a boy ‘clean’ (*gtsang ma* or, in the case of the Pan chen ’os sprul’s elder brother, *ma shod pa phyed*), which may be given by neighbours, relatives, or lamas, is, at first glance, prescribed to protect the child from obstacles, but it also initiates a practice which shapes the person of a *sprul sku*. *Gtsang ma* conveys several meanings. With respect to ‘keeping clean’, the boy will be bathed far more frequently than is the norm and will wear only clean clothing. However, apart from the idea of ‘keeping clean’, *gtsang ma* also implies avoiding polluting circumstances, which means that he cannot receive food from outside of his immediate household (since it might be poisoned), nor even food, customarily given to a young child, that has been semi-masticated for him in his mother’s mouth. He should frequently be offered religious pills (*byin rlabs*). Furthermore, his clothes cannot be touched nor stepped over by non-family members, and, in particular, by unknown women. Little girls, who might inadvertently jump over the boy in play, should be kept away from the boy as much as possible. *Gtsang ma* may also imply disciplining a child. Thus, keeping a boy ‘clean’ is a practice that isolates the child from certain interactions with others. Since such isolation and care is unlikely to go unobserved, the strategy of deflecting obstacles by keeping a child ‘clean’ effectively constitutes a sign that the child is, at least potentially, a *sprul sku*.

As practices, maintaining secrecy and cleanliness appear to serve strategically to legitimate a prospective *sprul sku*’s candidacy in the local community. I turn now to a strategy that may serve more retrospectively—that is, after a candidate is recognised—as a sign of legitimacy that I shall draw from an excerpt of an account given by the mother of the present Khams sprul rin po che.

Khams sprul rin po che[8]

In the eighth month of her pregnancy, the mother of Tashi Jong’s Ninth Khams sprul rin po che, who was born in 1980, dreamed that she was going to a temple with her friends to pray before the Buddha statue and to perform an incense offering ritual (*bsangs gsol*) at the

[8] This is an excerpt from an interview given me by the mother of the Ninth Khams sprul rin po che in Tashi Jong, Himachal Pradesh, India, on November 5, 1994.

stupa. Her husband's mother experienced an identical dream at that time. After the birth of her son, she was asked by an old woman who was a family friend from Khams whether the child had been born, and what the sex of the child was. Once the woman's questions were answered, she advised the parents to keep their son clean (*gtsang ma*) because she had experienced unusual dreams of a white elephant coming to the family's house. The parents, however, did not take the old woman's advice seriously and did not take any special precautions. The mother then began to receive a series of recurring dreams in which she found herself inside her house with her son when three *sprul sku* arrived claiming that her son was their root guru and expressing their intention to take him away to their monastery. In her dreams, the mother felt that she must not surrender her child and took reassurance from the fact that her mother-in-law, who would surely stand as an ally in resisting the lamas' request, was in a nearby room. When Rin po che's mother informed her husband's mother of her dream on the following day, her mother-in-law assured her that she would not lose her son to the dream lamas. Her mother-in-law, however, advised her to seek the advice of another lama about the dream. The lama whom they consulted performed a divination that indicated everything was well, but six days after she experienced the last of these dreams, an actual search party arrived to claim her son.

Both mother and mother-in-law experienced other visions before the reincarnation of Khams sprul rin po che was officially recognised. One night, the mother was sleeping on the bed with her baby, and her husband, whose stomach was upset, was frequently rising to visit the toilet. The mother-in-law slept in another room which was kept as a shrine room (*chos khang*). The mother happened to be awake when her husband was returning from one of his visits to the toilet, and she was frightened by a vision of a white man who was following her husband. When her husband returned from another visit to the toilet, she once more saw the apparition. She was so frightened she asked her husband not to leave their room because an apparition was following him, but he replied that no such thing was occurring. Although she saw the apparition standing near the door to the toilet, her husband saw nothing. Since she was unable to mollify her terror, she crept into the shrine room where her mother-in-law was sleeping and felt safer.

Her mother-in-law experienced a vision on the very day that the family was to make the final decision as to whether they would release their son to the monastery. According to Rin po che's mother, her mother-in-law had been unaware of the fact that the boy had been

recognised as the reincarnation of Khams sprul rin po che because she had been in Mon Tawang (*Mon rta dbang*), Arunachal Pradesh. In Mon Tawang, the mother-in-law was about to go to sleep in a shrine room when she noticed a small golden insect moving up and down on the table. The sight of this insect and its movement made her feel very strange. The following day, her son and daughter-in-law, who had determined that they could not reach a decision about sending their son to a monastery without consulting her, sent a jeep to fetch her. The husband's mother's vision of the insect persuaded her and her son and daughter-in-law that something very unusual was taking place and that the boy must be given to the monastery.[9]

Prior to his recognition, Khams sprul rin po che was very sick. Although he was over three years of age, he could not walk like his playmates because he was always lying ill in his bed. His parents had been unknowingly feeding him food that was not very clean and he would stay seated in an area that attracted flies. However, on the day of his recognition he underwent a cleansing ritual (*khrus gsol*) and immediately after that began to walk and run. When Rdzong gsar rin po che as a member of the search party initially encountered the boy, he instructed the parents to keep the boy clean (*gtsang ma*) and gave them some medicine to remove the excretions from the boy's eyes. After Khams sprul rin po che's recognition, his babysitter, who had been suffering from epilepsy, was also completely cured.

Discussion

This account given by Khams sprul rin po che's mother foregrounds another practice that may occur during the search process for a *sprul sku*, that of resistance. While pregnant, the *sprul sku*'s mother and her mother-in-law experienced an identical auspicious dream, but the mother paid no heed to her neighbour's dream or advice. She found recurring dreams of lamas coming to claim her son disturbing, and postponed the decision to give her child to the monastery until her mother-in-law returned, armed with her pivotal vision of a strange golden insect. However, the immediate consequences of her resistance manifested as forms of obstacles (*bar chad*)—her son was ill and could not walk or speak properly and her babysitter suffered affliction until the boy was recognised.

[9] I thank Françoise Pommaret for informing me that in Bhutan, a golden insect may represent the *bla* or *srog*.

Although parents of only one son are generally very reluctant to give him to a monastery, I have encountered only one instance of a family's successful resistance of monastic efforts to recruit their son, and in this case, the family members were well-established aristocrats. A pervasive Tibetan belief holds that a child who is recognised as a *sprul sku* and not offered to his monastery will likely die. However, this belief, apart from encouraging parents to accede to monastic wishes, may also be seen as shoring up the popular credibility of a *sprul sku* candidate whose parents initially resist signs that their son is a *sprul sku*. Parents who resist such signs appear to rescind the sort of agency granted the notoriously talkative mother (or father), who may be gambling with her or his credibility. Thus, I suggest that resistance, like secrecy, constitutes agency by serving as an oblique strategy of legitimation.

CONCLUSION

What I have tried to show is how portents interpreted as signaling the arrival or imminent arrival of a *sprul sku* may inspire practices which, in turn, may be popularly interpreted as signs of a *sprul sku*'s legitimacy. In this context, it is possible to speak of the "sociability of signs", since, to follow Richard Fardon (1985: 149), their communication is associated with "culturally recognized forms of interaction" and, therefore, entails social complicity. Local agency is constituted when these signs are discussed, when a young boy's family abstains from discussing them, when a young boy is kept particularly clean, and even when the significance of these signs is purportedly resisted.

At the outset, I noted that portents may establish local, if not official, certainties that a particular child is or may be a *sprul sku*. Search parties may invite reports of such signs and may utilise them to narrow the field of *sprul sku* candidates, but such signs rarely, if at all, secure official recognition of a particular candidate. However, there are instances when members of a *sprul sku* candidate's natal household or community, or followers of the previous *sprul sku* reject the official recognition of another candidate. In such cases, certainties established at the local level through the recognition of portents may assume greater import.

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